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THE
PERMANENT
MESSAGE
OF THE
EXODUS

JOHN SMITH



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THE PERMANENT MESSAGE
OF THE EXODUS

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THE
PERMANENT MESSAGE
OF THE EXODUS

AND STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF MOSES

BY THE
REV. JOHN SMITH, D.D.

BROUGHTON PLACE CHURCH, EDINBURGH

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P R E F A C E

School of Religion

AFTER a visit to Egypt in the spring of 1893, a long-cherished purpose of mine to unfold, for spiritual edification, the personality of Moses, took shape in this series of lectures to my congregation. Entering on the study with this immediate aim, one found the internal attractions of the narrative drawing him out into wider, though still simply practical, courses of thought. Not only was the narrative brimful of suggestive correspondences with the present, but, by every evidence that could influence the religious sense, it was more and more felt to be on the highest plane of revelation. Taking these chapters as one found them, neither going behind to seek for sources, nor presuming by any private light to separate the legendary from the historic, the brooding mind was more and more conscious of certain outstanding characteristics in the story, which pointed irresistibly to one conclusion.

Here were a movement and a history, on a platform of their own, issuing from a creative Word of God, gathering into themselves the fragmentary unveilings of the past, raising fundamental spiritual issues, moving on the lines which the Kingdom of God has since pursued, full of forecasts, in institution

and deliverance, of greater blessings to come, evidently drafted in clearest consciousness of what the coming centuries were to bring, and invested, if we look deep enough, with the same radiance of holiness which burns in Isaiah or the Psalms. And so, contrary to intention, the merely individual aim was widened, and the attempt was made, restricting oneself to the earlier part of the history, to read off, for spiritual edification, the permanent message of the Exodus.

But it may be asked, Is it permissible to treat this period, in disregard of the labours of criticism? To this the answer is that, consistently with the most loyal recognition of the place and value of historic criticism in biblical science, it is permissible. With the onesidedness characteristic of all progress, men are forgetting that there are two ways by which we can come to a determinative judgment as to any literature, and that one of these is primary, positive, final, being internal; the other secondary, auxiliary, and merely probable, being external, and conversant with inference and testimony.

To go no further back, Protestantism, in coming to stand on the Word of God, followed the first method. The Bible was accepted on the evidence inherent to itself. Because of what the human soul found, of illumination, conviction, deliverance, life, and fellowship with God from its pages, it was accepted without question as Divine. Passing in from this standpoint to an understanding of the book which had brought such

a transfiguration, men could verify in experience its teachings. But to advance at once to the point with which we have to do, they found the great facts of revelation (which stood authenticated as divine by their effects) imbedded in a great history. God had moved, only gradually and by definite stages, to the fulfilment of His purposes. And now at last, in the culmination of that purpose in Christ, the living soul, the eternal essence of that purpose, stood unveiled. And in the inspired thought, especially of Paul, the great sequences of revelation binding the whole Bible in the unity of an advancing purpose, are adequately set forth.

The Church of Christ has entered once for all, and irrevocably, into that conception of the unity of revelation, as shown by the unity of One Divine Conscious Purpose, passing through it. Faith having once seen this, can never un-see it, any more than Science, having grasped the Copernican theory, can wink that knowledge away. Theologians may err in their representations of this unity. But this unity, shadowed forth in the Gospels, and so vividly revealed in the Epistles, is a divine indestructible fact. We may even, with strictest truth, describe it as a constituent element of the redeemed consciousness. For now that the whole plan is unveiled, the unity of spirit and aim has so revealed itself at every point of the whole structure of revelation, that much of the fulness of New Testament light breaks from every facet of Old Testament incident and institution and prophecy.

Revelation having been thus studied from within, in the light of that spiritual sense which it had awakened within men, there remained another problem. How did this literature, thus characterised, actually originate? Manifestly this could only be settled on grounds of fact, through application of the canons of a sound and sober criticism. It is useless objecting to the strictest sifting of documents. Christianity can only stand on the tried foundations of fact and truth. Moreover, we have much to be thankful for in the labours of criticism. Into what vivid light they have brought the men, the events, the teachings of the prophetic era! But it is equally manifest that the province of criticism is external and subsidiary. It cannot alter the problem to be investigated. It must take the Old Testament in the full range of its contents, implications, and effects, into account, before it embarks on conjecture and analysis and inquiry, else it has not fairly stated the question, and can hardly be hoped to find the adequate answer.

The inquiries of criticism have been proceeding—the centre of interest in these last years having moved from the Continent to our own country. And now, having presented its view of how the Spiritual grew up in Israel, and especially of the manner in which the Old Testament canon was gradually formed, Criticism is waiting for the verdict of the Church. That verdict is more than ever doubtful. What weight attaches to scholarship, ability, and enormous labour, especially when combined with the recognition of a

certain element of revelation, has given this view a certain ascendancy in the thought of this generation. But the great mass of intelligent Christians in our country, as events seem urging them to a decision, are conscious of a growing revulsion from the whole hypothesis, springing out of considerations, which are central to that belief in the unity of revelation, which faith cannot renounce.

At such a time it is not only permissible but required, that we should test the grounds on which Christians have hitherto given the Bible so supreme and controlling an authority, over the life of the individual and the Church. And therefore it humbly appeared to me, that even such incidental and informal unveilings of the unity underlying revelation, as are to be found along with biographic delineation, and exposition, and admonition, in these practical discourses, might not be without their use to reverent and thoughtful minds.

EDINBURGH, *November* 1895.

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I

MOSES, THE MAN OF GOD

'And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.'—

EXODUS ii. 2.

THESE words describe the commonest event in the history of the world. 'Every minute dies a man, every minute one is born.' And yet the highest destinies of mankind are hanging upon this young life, that first saw the light in an Egyptian mud-hovel, as they have hung upon no other single human life since the world began.

The prevailing school of history, enamoured of scientific method, is prone to make light of the immense controlling influence of great personalities. In explaining the changes involved in human progress, they dwell mainly on such moulding circumstances as climate, material conditions, race, the necessities imposed upon men by external forces, the slow actions and reactions of institutions, and laws, and literatures. And the student would be foolish who undervalued these. Still, it is only by narrowing our conceptions of human progress to improved material conditions, or to advancing intellectual development, that writers can conceal from themselves the immense effect of single personalities, not

once or twice, but again and again, upon the courses of history, and the highest destinies of mankind.

To confine ourselves, as we have thus far done, to those who were but men, how entirely different, in all the highest respects, the civilised world would be, if Moses, and Paul, and Luther had never been, if the influences and conceptions which have gone forth from them had never freshened the fountains of human life, nor contributed their quotas to human progress. Even though what these writers say, was true of other great men—great discoverers, inventors, scientists—that sooner or later the world would have arrived at their discoveries without their aid ; yet in the moral and spiritual sphere, the greatness of those leaders to whom we have referred, the depth of their surrender, the fulness and nobility of their consecration, and all the paths of conflict, aspiration, and sacrifice, by which they rose to the culmination of their careers, were necessary to their reaching the truth they won, and so to the empire they have exercised over men.

If these men had never been, others their equals must have arisen if those spiritual gains were to be achieved. Only on like lofty planes of consecration and endeavour can such visions of the divine be secured. And so the great men of the Bible and of Christendom, are the perennial treasure of the Church. They are the great spiritual types to which her sons must more and more seek to be conformed. In them we see the highest human examples of that life in God which we are called to live, of that divine method of spiritual culture to which we are subjected, of that spiritual strength, devotion, and beauty after which

we seek. Their very human limitations and one-sided individualities, which make them but broken reflections of the perfect divine light, bring the divine in them nearer to us and more clearly within our ken. In a very real sense, 'earth by heaven, and heaven by changeful earth,' are 'illustrated and mutually endeared.'

Such are the thoughts with which we enter upon a study of Moses, the man of God. We know indeed that we are addressing those who are far from being indifferent to whatever is sublime in human character, of prime importance in human history, brilliant in literary expression, invested with imaginative splendour, pulsing with a tragical intensity. The subject will not have for us less interest, but more, that it introduces us to some of earth's most interesting sites and scenes, peopled Egypt and the desert solitudes of Sinai; the great world-capitals of Memphis and Tanis, with all their imperishable wonders, Heliopolis, the immemorial Oxford of the East, and, hard by, Goshen, the stern school of bondage; that it sets us in the midst of the most ancient civilisation, brings us into contact with the most ancient pagan culture, and receives illumination from the accumulated treasures so lately brought to light of Egyptian antiquity. Especially must we be attracted by the circumstance that our narrative passes athwart the heroic age of Egyptian history, brings us into contact with kings like Seti and Rameses, the terror of whose prowess had travelled into all Eastern lands, the monuments of whose greatness, in statue, temple, and tomb, still fill their own—whose very bodies, rescued from the grave, bear upon them, after more than three thousand years, not merely the form of

humanity, but the stamp of character, and some last lingering traces of manly nobility.

It would indeed argue brutish ignorance and insensibility, if all these interesting associations did not throw the warmth of a human, the dignity of a historic, interest round our theme. Much more would it betoken a well-nigh impossible coldness and narrowness, if we failed to be aroused by all the unrivalled dramatic splendours of the narrative itself, which beggar by their unapproached magnificence the grandest creations of imaginative genius, and more than tax the art of Handel, with all the resources of modern music, adequately to express.

Yet if the historic, biographic, and artistic interest were all, the life of Moses were no theme for the house of God or the Lord's day. We meet in the great congregation, not as students, but as worshippers. Our aim is not to project ourselves into the movements of the past for ends of historic knowledge, or intellectual delight, but the thoroughly practical and immediate one, of obtaining guidance and quickening for the deepest life of all, that which determines our conduct, and brings us face to face with the living God. The Christian Church is a witness to the fact that God has spoken to men. The Christian assemblies are convened to worship this God; and also in order that, through living messengers interpreting by the Spirit His revealed will, God's Word to them may be brought home. We fall from the significance and intention of Christian preaching, where the speaker does not speak in the name of the Lord, and the hearer does not receive the message as from Him.

We have spoken at the outset, as if Moses stands alone among all the great leaders of religion in the

width and perennial character of his influence on the world. Now this is no vague declamatory statement, but meant for sober and literal belief. Let us test it in thorough and serious fashion. Of course we assume that the religion of Jesus Christ is the one true, complete, and final religion, in the universal acceptance and full appropriation of which mankind will attain its perfection. This, then, being taken for granted, whatever prepared men for, or foreshadowed this religion, must be regarded as of paramount value. That the religion of the Jews was such a preparation and foreshadowing cannot be denied. Those who place the highest value on the profoundly original elements of Christianity, confess most frankly that its roots are in the prior religion of Judaism. But where did the Jewish religion get that profound spirituality and vision of God, in which it rose so far above the highest wisdom of ancient times? The courses of present-day thought have turned our attention full upon the prophets. And certainly in such writings as those of Amos, and Hosea, and Isaiah, the universal moral sovereignty, the burning holiness, the lofty spiritual love of Jehovah flash out with a splendour ineffably above the reaches of unaided human thought.

Shall we say then that this unique lifting power of Judaism originates with the prophets? It is impossible. For though it is true that they reach out to new and transfiguring conceptions of Jehovah, His worship and kingdom, yet all their writings presuppose earlier communications of the divine, a previous covenant history, and hopes. Indeed, prophecy attained to the unique place and influence which it occupied in Israel and Judah, because, in

sounding the present and forecasting the future, it stood upon a foundation of divine promise made to their fathers, and could look back upon a bright and inspiring history, in which the first stages of that promise had been fulfilled.

Travelling back from the prophets, we can find no living beginning of Israel's spiritual history, till we reach the age of Moses. Even those who look upon the pentateuchal legislation as a slow growth, reaching its completeness at a late stage of Israel's history, and who will only allow that the merest rudiment—the ten commandments and some other fragments—came from Moses, are ready to confess that the great spiritual momentum, the governing conceptions of Jehovah and of an elect people, came from Him. Now, without entering into the merits of that controversy, about which the last word has by no means been said, we are willing, in conveying an impression of the magnificence of Moses' work, to take for the moment that ground. Yea, we shall describe that work, not in our own words, but in the brilliant language of an advanced German critic (Ewald) of a former generation, who adds something of the insight of genius to the accuracy and acumen of the scholar: 'The higher religion which rose under Moses upon the soil of older communities made its advent with such amazing power as to set up the pure spiritual God, who here first appeared on earth and first showed His infinite might, as the sole ruler even for all secular relations, and expressly excluded every human king.' At another place he says, 'This first form in which the Theocracy was established was the boldest and most gigantic conceivable. If even the individual with difficulty dedicates his entire life at all times to the

Invisible One . . . how much more difficult must it be for an entire people without any human Kingship, and the external order and stability thereby gained, ever to find their unity and strength in the invisible and mystic kingdom, and voluntarily to renounce for their kingdom every support from without? So entirely are the Israelites Jehovah's own nation that, in the strictest sense, they hold Jehovah alone to be King. The nation looks to Jehovah; for Him alone they live, fight, conquer; by His arm mighty, though invisible, they hope, as in former times, so in all future ages, to be saved. Whatever of true love and tender devotion a happy people may feel elsewhere towards an earthly king, is here all given to the King Eternal and Invisible as the highest object of all thought and love, in incalculably greater strength and purity. They know Him to be present, although unseen, with His holy glance and His almighty power in their camp, their field, their dwelling. With Him as their Leader they go forth to battle, with Him they return home; if He Himself in His full majesty is not to be heard by mortal ear, yet in the darkest times they clearly catch the voice of His messengers.'

That this 'gigantic work, this Titanic enterprise,' was the achievement of Moses, in and by himself, we would not have you believe. It was the work of God, using all the resources of His omnipotence and the wonders of His grace. Still Moses was His chosen instrument. He endowed him with superb natural qualities, made him to pass through a remarkable course of training, and by His grace raised him to so wonderful a height of spiritual vision, to such a strength of faith, and to a heroism so exalted and rare, that even this unexampled work was none

too great,—that he stands forth on the very loftiest plane of human greatness, a model and a marvel to all mankind.

It is with the man even more than with his work that we shall have to do. Passing by all matters of controversy, we would discover through what discipline, along what stages of spiritual progress, after what conflicts he attained.

There is an old Jewish proverb, ‘When the tale of bricks is doubled, then Moses appears.’ God’s opportunity was found in Israel’s direst extremity. Perhaps we are here face to face with the most marvellous pause in the onward march of the Kingdom of God. What a long time it is to look back till we find the Stuarts on the throne! How immeasurable the span which separates us in Scotland, from the overthrow of the Papacy and the triumph of the Reformation! Yet you must go further back, before you cover a period, as long as that which the Israelites spent in captivity in Egypt. All that time, far from the homes of their fathers, and from scenes associated with patriarchal religion, they were living in a heathen land. On every side were the temples of pagan idolatry. The service of these nature-divinities and beast-gods drew forth the enthusiasm and the heroic exertion of kings, and commanded the absolute devotion of the people. Except the great traditions of the patriarchs, the Hebrews had no source of spiritual inspiration. There was no common form of worship, no public system of sacrifice, which might serve as a bond and a source of renewing to their spiritual life. Their task-masters would recognise no duty, would allow no privilege of Sabbath rest. Age followed age, and except in the devotion of individual hearts,

and in the fellowship of the family, Jehovah was not worshipped, nor were His promises made known ; and every kind of interest, every form of influence prevailed, to crush that reverence out of their hearts. For seventy years, while the work and name of their great leader Joseph survived, they lived in plenty and comfort. Then followed two hundred and sixty years during which there were great disturbances in the land. The Shepherd-Kings—of Semitic stock like themselves—who had reigned over Lower Egypt for centuries grew weak. The Egyptian monarchs of Southern Egypt waxed mightier and mightier. Among them were some like Thothmes the Great, who spread the terror of his arms to Syria, to the plains of Tigris and Euphrates, and far up toward the sources of the Nile. In this magnificent Egyptian reaction, the children of Israel, aliens and suspect as of the same race with the conquered, would suffer grievous disadvantage.

But worse—unspeakably worse—was yet to come. At last we arrive at the times of the great nineteenth dynasty. Seti, a great warrior-king, whose body lies now unveiled in Gizeh Museum, wished to consolidate his Empire. He looked back on those kings of Semitic race, who had long reigned over the Delta, as usurpers. They and their great men—among them Joseph—were profoundly uninteresting to him. Yea, the Hebrews themselves, though they had joined in no intrigue against him, were suspected as belonging to the same race with those foes. This was the other king who arose, to whom Joseph was nothing, who hated them because of their blood and race-kindred with those old usurping kings. Believing them to be a standing menace to his kingdom, and

affrighted at their rapid multiplication, he shrewdly resolved to crush them under the yoke of servitude, and to utilise their forced labour to strengthen his kingdom.

It was a stroke of clever statesmanship. In the interests of his dynasty he did deal wisely with them. But the bondage was bitter to the Hebrews, and it lasted for three generations. Year followed year, and no relief came. The fathers dropped into the grave broken with the toils of the field, but the sons had to take up the yoke which their fathers had let fall. Nor had they in all that time one great soul with whom God conversed, and whose words might stir and sustain their hearts. The latest memories of such communication and heavenly impulse lay four centuries behind. What a wonder that the very thought of God was not crushed out of their minds! But, marvellous to tell, it lived. Some might fall away, many corruptions doubtless crept in, but still the faith in Jehovah lived in the heart of the nation. Ay, more, they held fast, cowed and broken in spirit though they were, to the great promise of God to their race.

They took no part in the revolutions of those times. They bowed to the native kings of the south as they had bowed to the usurpers. But the moment that even Seti in all his might, unwittingly went athwart their covenant-hope, the very women among them flamed into revolt. The one external presence of God, the one sign in these four silent and stagnant centuries that God was fulfilling His promise, was in the marvellous multiplication of their race. Even in captivity he was making their seed like the sand of the sea. Some faint flicker of hope played in their sad hearts.

Their children were sons of promise to whom, or to whose successors, the Word of God would be fulfilled. Heathen Seti drove right against this faith in commanding the men-children to be slain. Aiming at their extermination as a separate people, he paved the way for their emancipation. The midwives, supported doubtless by the determination of the people, found means of evading his command. They would not forfeit for a single son, if they could, the possibility of realising the covenant-hope.

Is there in all the world another such record, of the obscuration and crushing of the religious instincts of a whole people, over so vast a period of time? Surely if, in an infantile condition, while its great principles were yet undeveloped and its imperishable resources were unrevealed, living religion could endure such an ordeal, and burst into new life after such interminable delay, then come to full maturity, and reposing at last on complete spiritual foundations, it will resist every onset, blossom afresh after long backsliding and partial defeat, securing at length a universal triumph. This is a most comforting thought. Watching the dying down of the spiritual, the resurgence of material interests and aims, the reappearance of the pagan spirit in the advanced thought of the world, the awelessness which owns not even a divine superior, but is its own God and lives for its own happiness alone, and which scruples not to end this life when it pleases, as having a right to do what it will with its own—watching these and many symptoms beside, one is oftentimes filled with fear. Even in Scotland, the last stronghold of the spiritual, the breaking down of the old reverences and supports of religion is going on day by day. Must that end, as so many

would like it to end, in the dying out of the spiritual from the life of man, in the fading of all supernatural revealings into conscious myth and illusion, in a mere life in the seen, bound by chains of sense and time?

Let us look at God's method as revealed in the long captivity of Egypt. Sometimes in a thousand years He does not perform the work of a day. But then, again, in a day He does the work of a thousand years. We believe that through all the decays of the present, God is moving on to some creative epoch yet to dawn, even as upon the long darkness of the captivity there broke, as in a moment, not only for Israel, but for the world, a new spiritual day.

But, says some one, was the delay necessary, after all? Most assuredly. The Mosaic age could not have come sooner than it did. God was preparing His people for world-conquest. Not only in the last hurried flight, when they borrowed jewels of silver and jewels of gold before marching out into the wilderness, but all through the captivity, He was spoiling the Egyptians to fit His people for their work. A wandering tribe could never have brought blessing to mankind. God overruled their long settlement in Goshen, and even the fierce persecutions which turned them into brickmakers and builders, to prepare them for a civilised and settled mode of life. The pressure of persecution welded them into a nation. The influence of heathenism, resisted and repelled, bound them by the invisible bond of a common hope. Then instead of living in a quiet bay, they were on the great highway of the world. Egypt kept up communication with what were in that day the utmost ends of the earth. In all the arts and sciences

this people stood supreme. Of these we shall more particularly treat when we describe the education of Moses for his work. Their buildings even to-day are the admiration and despair of the world.

It would have been impossible for the Israelites to live in compulsory association with such a people, even though there was much in their life that roused disapproval, without learning the arts of civilised life, widening their intellectual horizon—in a word, rising into the plane of the organised nations of the world. And so, in our time, through the decays that are in progress, God is working to wider ends than we can conceive. Do not tie yourselves to the shibboleths of a crude and undeveloped past. Repudiate utterly all narrow, individualistic, or sectarian views of the progress of the world. God is working on to the universal subjugation of mankind under His sway. Egypt and Assyria shall be with Israel a blessing in the midst of the land. He is permitting a time of breaking down and decay, that He may make room, in His kingdom, more grandly realised, for those who are still without. The very social unrest is driving men in upon Christ, that they may find in His teaching loftier standards for individual living, juster conceptions of relative obligation. The widespread unbelief, the manifold antagonisms to contemporary religious teaching and life, are letting in a lurid light upon the multiplied divisions and surface differences of the Churches; and are compelling all who own Christ's name to converge upon the essentials of spiritual Christianity, and to join heart and hand in bringing the world to Christ's feet. Measuring our weakness against the wants of the world, we are re-discovering the fulness of the promises, realising

afresh the might of the Spirit, and learning to throw ourselves upon the almighty risen Redeemer, in a large trust that will not be denied. While the captivity continued with ever-increasing severity, God was multiplying Israel exceedingly. While the wisdom of the world is triumphing in the seeming defeat of the faith, God is giving trophies of His grace on every shore. Some day the world, like that heathen king, will run athwart the conscience of God's own, and wake to find itself powerless before a new creative day of religion—before Christianity triumphant in millions, ransomed and renewed by His grace.

One sign that God was working through every circumstance is seen in the events leading up to Moses' birth. Little did the Egyptian monarch think that in every shrewd stroke of his policy he was Jehovah's unwitting servant, paving the way for the education in his own palace, and with all the resources of his own land, of the Hebrews' deliverer. Yet so it was. His edict to slay the men-children compelled their being hidden. His further and more cruel edict, turning every Egyptian into a detective or spy on the Hebrews, compelled Jochebed to trust her little one to the chances of the waters, less cruel than cruel men. God sent the monarch's daughter to rescue that child. Though his own mother nursed him, the royal palace received him. Seti's devotion prepared the instrument that was to break his power. Yea, to look wider, all that Egyptian civilisation, with its backward horizon of more than two thousand years, and with all its astonishing material splendour, but without any message for man, because destitute of all real vision of God, was made by this Hebrew-hater

to serve its highest end in training Moses for his work. For in training him he was preparing one to whom God was to give light which He had denied to the sages of his own land, and who, because of that light, so high above their heathen self-sufficiency, was to have committed to him the task, peerless and solitary in the whole history of the Orient, of laying the foundation of moral and spiritual progress for mankind. Man proposes, but God disposes. Who hath resisted His will? O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!

II

THE GREAT RENUNCIATION

'In those days, when Moses was grown.'—EXODUS II. 11.

THIS is a spiritual history. And we require first and foremost, for its discernment, spiritual vision. We are peculiarly happy in that we can put side by side with the history in Exodus the description of the proto-martyr Stephen, and the profound interpretation of the Christian sage, who bridged the gulf between old and new in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

It is our desire, in the present lecture, to sketch the providential training of these forty years, and especially, with the help of New Testament insight, to describe the great conflict of this man of God, culminating in the sublime renunciation of every earthly good, for his people and their covenant-hopes.

In some brown hovel of sun-dried brick, a child has been born to Amram and Jochebed, both of the tribe of Levi. There, as in the poorest city garret, or out in Bedouin tents on the lonely wild, there would be joy,—the instinctive and spontaneous joy that comes to rich and poor, savage and civilised, when a man is born into the world. But on the back of the joy would flow in a rushing tide of agony. The edict of Seti had gone out against this young life. With the unreasoning love of a woman, Jochebed

determined, while she could, to keep him concealed. Day by day, what watchful care would compass that little cot ! With what loving eagerness would mother or sister try to stifle or drown the little piercing cry ! But more and more pressing became the question, What can be done to save the child, when concealment was no longer possible ? To give him up to death—what heart can consent to that ? Had he been the plainest morsel of humanity ever put into a fond parent's arms, the maternal instinct would have swept the thought aside. But Jochebed, as she looks, is struck with a beauty in him more than mortal. Stephen uses a striking phrase regarding him—'fair unto God.' Something whispered to her that this was no common child. What if God had something great to do by him for His people and His cause !

But, alas ! was ever woman so sore bestead ? What could she do ? Whither turn ? Egyptian eyes were everywhere. Next moment, and her boy might be snatched from her grasp. This is the kind of crisis in which, if we have no faith, we seek counsel of despair. Many a modern mother would have made away with herself and babe. And people would have been found to praise her Roman fortitude. As if the worst crisis ever experienced, were not a chosen opportunity of trusting God, and proving His almighty goodness. How many are seeking counsel of despair, in an act which is the coward's refuge, the negation of all trust in God, the renunciation of the last tie of obligation to God, brutal egotism, insisting on the creature's right to do what he will with himself, and signalising the madness of the claim by rushing on self-chosen death ! It is the profoundest sign of the growing irreligion of our times, that even Christians

do not look upon such an act with unspeakable horror, that apologies for suicide are beginning to appear in the magazine literature of our time.

Jochebed rested in God, however, and into her agonised but trustful heart there came a plan wonderfully strange, fraught with perils, but which yet caught up her soul into sudden resolution. When we are following a divine thought, or yielding to a divine leading, we can be calm and strong in face of a hundred fancied dangers. Need I describe her act? Has it not been visible to every eye in the painter's fine representation? She did not deify the Nile as did the Egyptians. But even to her it was God's minister of plenty to that land. Mayhap He would use these beneficent waters to carry her boy to some safe place. And so she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it not only with the tenacious Nile mud, but with bitumen; and put the child therein, and laid him in the flags by the river's brink.

With what a heavy heart the mother would go home, all her hopes crushed under the tumult of her fears. From some safe seclusion a sister watches the frail ark. And then ensued what so many million times has ensued in the experience of the children of God. By a course of events, the most natural in the world, and yet so chosen as to suggest irresistibly a divine hand, help comes. Looking over the papyrus reeds where she stood half hid, the young Hebrew girl sees far off in the clear air a courtly retinue coming over the fertile plain. It is the Pharaoh's daughter coming to bathe. Yes, from the home of the tyrant, from the innermost shrine of silken ease and lavish luxury, advances one, ignorant of these controversies of state, whose life was one round of pleasure,

and whose imperious will was law, to throw the shield of her protection around this charmed life. How she eyed the little babe, had it brought forth, was touched by its infantine cry, we shall not wait to describe. Miriam, if this was Miriam, played her part well, and in short space Jochebed had her baby back in her embrace, its imperially appointed nurse, and free to show him to all the world.

Added to his wonderful beauty, this divine deliverance would convince Jochebed that this was a child of destiny. How eagerly she would breathe into the opening faculties, fear of her God, the great outlines of covenant history, the passion of her covenant-hope! Such regal minds open very early, and are tenacious of the slightest impression. And that nature which afterwards could bear the insupportable glory of revelation from Sinai, would drink in every religious lesson as the parched earth drinks the summer rain.

But let us see the boy grown, and entering the palace of Memphis as the son of the princess-royal of that time. Every visitor to Egypt can realise the scene on which Moses looked. True indeed have proved the words of Jeremiah, 'Noph is waste and desolate, without an inhabitant.' Whilst at Luxor, and Abydos, and many other places, enormous remains of temples and monuments still bear witness to the former grandeur of these cities, every trace of Memphis has disappeared. As you ride from Bedrasheen, through clumps of palms, past a mean village and a sacred lake, only one statue lying broken on the ground betrays the secret of the past. The natural features of the scene abide. Across the open fields is the tawny Libyan desert, honeycombed with graves, and dotted here and there with the hoary pyramids of Sakkara. A

few miles to the north the great pyramids of Gizeh bulk against the sky, in respect of mass and majesty, if not of form, more like works of nature than of man. At an equal distance, but more to the east, stand out the arid cliffs of the Mokattam hills, beneath which Cairo now lies, and from a lower ledge of which stands out the citadel, with the lance-like minarets of its mosque, in full view for many miles. On either bank the desert encroaches, but the mighty Nile rolling its great flood to the sea has rescued broad stretches from its hot breath, and the vast capital of Seti stood in verdant fields and among palms.

It is more difficult to realise the splendour of the imperial city, the vast frowning temples, the gaily decorated homes of prince and peer, the far-stretching lines of peasant dwellings. One thought, however, comes to the traveller wandering over those sites of ancient empire, which does not readily strike a Western mind. Misled by our very limited conceptions of antiquity, derived from Greek and Roman times, we think of the age of Moses as in the morning of the world; and, consequently, as of necessity, very rude and primitive. But when you stand upon Egyptian soil, this is what you learn. There lay behind Moses a far longer continuous civilisation than, in this nineteenth century and within these British Isles, lies behind this latest generation.

At what point in the far past would you date the dawn of that British civilisation which exists to this hour? Would you go back to the time of Alfred the Great? That is a liberal computation when you take into account with what that civilisation is compared. Yet that is only a period of twelve hundred years. Behind Moses in Egypt there lay a

continuous civilisation of more than two thousand years. These great pyramids—surely among the vastest works of man—went back to a period anterior to that. The mighty sphinx cut out of the living rock was older still. But not only do these enormous monuments testify to the abnormal energy and wondrous faculty of these world's grey fathers; but statues, sepulchres, wood carvings, paintings, instinct with life and beauty, witness to a refinement which no later age surpassed.

Bursting forth into such an unparalleled splendour of achievement in the dawn of their history, the Egyptians, not without revolutions and declensions, but without, even in the worst times, falling from their great traditions, had gone on their way of conquest to the fulfilment of their constant passion, primacy among the nations of the world. Of their raids over wide areas of the Eastern world, of the tribute poured into their coffers, of the enormous edifices reared by successive kings, of the width of their empire at particular periods, we shall not treat. We are led by that word of Stephen's—that Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians—to mention their achievements in other fields.

At an early age Moses would pass to the neighbouring University of Heliopolis, and there, in that Oxford of the East, he would come into contact with all the learning of his time. At the centre of his studies was the great system of the national religion. From a primitive monotheism, the colleges of the priests had developed a great symbolic system of Nature-worship, with its divinities of light and darkness, of generation and destruction, of earth and air and the under-world, whose figures (with the worship

paid to each) are written with an iron pen on the rock of their temples for ever. From the lips of these priests, great in learning, august from the possession of an almost royal prestige and influence, Moses must have learned the whole complicated and artificial system of their religion.

But there were other studies. Recent years have thrown very striking light, upon the intellectual activity and the international communication current at that early time. Between Babylonia, Palestine, and other countries, correspondence was frequent and regular. The Egyptian gentleman could write as freely in Babylonian script as in our day men in a similar position can write in German and French. Surviving writings show that there must have been diligent cultivation of poetry and prose. Examples of popular fiction have come down to us from a still earlier period. In music they were experts. Their astronomical knowledge, in the absence of our modern appliances, was surprisingly wide. Geometry, mensuration, and even some rude beginnings of trigonometry, were taught. Medicine was studied and practised. And centuries before, they had sent out an expedition of scientific exploration to remote parts of the East African coast.

But Moses not only enjoyed the culture of the schools. He profited from the education and discipline of public life. The adopted son of a princess, there was no career which he could not command. Entirely within the control of the royal houses were the great tasks of administration, and, 'mighty in word,' Moses may have impressed himself on the policy and government of his time. But far more important than the routine work of administration

was the supreme business of war. Seti was a Napoleon, insatiate for war. On the outside of his great Hypostyle hall of Karnak is a series of battle pictures, representing him as a conqueror crushing innumerable foes. His son Rameses, now associated with him, was intoxicated with the same consuming passion, and with a pride of his prowess which nought could content. The energies of the nation were strained, and over-strained, to realise their ambitious dreams. And Moses may have (there is some fragment of testimony to the effect) served in their Hittite wars.

‘Learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, mighty in words and deeds’—for forty intense crowded years that summed up Moses’ life. For far more than half of an ordinary human career he stood upon the steps of a throne, lived in the exclusive atmosphere of a court, enjoyed the pleasures, developed the tastes, pursued the ambitions, of a man born almost to a royal estate. And even in that high rank, and overpeered by monarchs of such prowess, he had exerted a powerful charm and won for himself renown. And that he enjoyed his position, delighted in his influence, and found pleasure in the exercise of his great functions, it would be foolish to doubt. In forty years associations become very dear, use and wont are tyrannous even to the strongest men.

As becomes manifest, however, before long, there is a deep and ceaseless ferment in his heart. He has not been able entirely to fit himself in to his great place in the Egyptian world. Long before the unrest became fully apparent to himself, the lynx eyes of the heathen priests could detect a tone of thought,

a strain of character which marked him out from all the men of his time. His mother's teaching had never died down in his mind. His very opportunities for learning all that Egypt had to teach, only brought out its immense moral inferiority to that lore of God which he had learned from his mother's lips. \

Universal tradition bears witness to his marvellous beauty, to the spell which he cast upon all whom he met. And in soul he must have been of that serene and lofty temper, which lives on high levels of thought and feeling, scarcely knowing the grosser ambitions, or touched by the coarser temptations of life. Circumstance, therefore, would bulk less in his view than in that of most men. Still, there would be much even in him, that would thirst for the advantages of his high position, that would cling to his refined surroundings, that would exult in the boundless range of influence and opportunity, that would repel, as a horrid dream, the possibility of *his* being associated with these Hebrew drudges and slaves, who, bemired, and well-nigh naked, were so often seen by him, scourged to their work in the brick-fields.

In the absence of historic fact, we are driven to conceive of the dawning of the spiritual in Moses as conforming to ordinary laws of spiritual experience.

Wordsworth speaks of 'years that bring the philosophic mind.' And where, in addition, there has entered a living knowledge of God, even when that knowledge is partially overborne, the advancing experience of later life sets it in fresh and more startling light. How frequently, in our common experience, crosses, perplexities, dark outlooks have given point and perspective to the half-buried faith and reverences of youth! Once the light of God has

broken in, we can never wholly reconcile ourselves to shadows. With mature years the deeper hungers would begin to stir, the outward veil of splendour would fall off, from that worship of natural forces incarnated in animal forms. Moses would feel—but far more intensely—that which the traveller in Egypt is conscious of to-day as he wends his way from temple to temple and tomb to tomb. What alone is incarnated there is brutal, egotistic, merciless human strength. The gods are pale entities beside the robust human figures, and are content to receive the self-idolatrous offerings of proud ambition as their highest meed of adoration and praise. Even under the shadows of the enormous Hypostyle hall of Karnak, one was tempted to say, a single breath of righteousness, one glimpse of a holy will, the solitary vision of a great Divine purpose, were worth it all.

But how different, when Moses turned to those holy memories, which came back to him in the soft tones of his mother's voice! With what a holy authority God spoke to the patriarchs, what revealing power was in His words, what searching holiness! How commanding the Personality who drew Abraham and Jacob into fuller and fuller surrender to Himself, thus educating them to a divine order and purpose in existence! With what sublime consistency He kept holding before them His far-reaching promise! One could see that the holy urgency which was in Jehovah's call, lifted these men up to a loftier plane, made them different from their former selves and from other men. As compared with this one true God, what were the beast gods—the bull, and hawk, and jackal, and crocodile divinities, which glared from every temple on his

view? His inmost soul responded to the revelation which lived and burned in the great memories of His people. They had reached to central truth, and what he saw around, in comparison, was dreams.

But, on the other hand, here was he the beflattered darling of a court, in the centre and on the apex of the most brilliant society in the world—musicians, poets, artists, historians, architects, as well as warriors and statesmen, contributing to its instruction and amusement, and dazzling and cultured women diffusing indefinable charm ;—here was he thus situated with a career opening before him of intoxicating magnificence. And had he not seen these brethren of his, ground beneath Pharaoh's iron heel, toiling, spirit-broken and exhausted under the pitiless scourge? Ah, it is not difficult to realise his thoughts. Might he not abide where he was, enjoy his privileges, retain his power, and yet worship Jehovah in his secret soul? It is a bait as old as Adam, as new as yesterday. In London, as in Memphis—ay, in prim Presbyterian Edinburgh—men are paltering with convictions, are asking whether, after all, it is necessary to make God supreme in this life, whether we may not have interests and ambitions apart, yet retain favour and fellowship with Him.

If we are right in imputing that thought to Moses, then certainly this other would follow. Yes! why, he would be a fool to give up his position. Would not that be to give up his only way to help his brethren? Whether could he accomplish more for them as an Egyptian prince or as a Hebrew slave? Feeling confident in his own reasoning, he would breathe freely again. It never could be that he would have to make so great a renunciation as this.

God does not condescend to argue with us in our vehemencies. He can wait. It is one little word of inspired commentary, that has opened all this part of Moses' conflict to me. What it is you will see by and by. But does he purpose serving God? that query would start up with tremendous force. 'Why, yes, with all my heart.' The very query, by the revulsion which it would create, makes him feel how ineffably deeper and stronger is the bond binding him to God, than all the ties which connect him with country and career. Well, but what does serving God mean? What did it mean to Abraham? Did it not signify renouncing country, kindred, and father's house at God's bare word? Did it not imply life-long, whole-souled, utter submission? Did not that patriarch, sitting loose from all beside, commit himself to an entire trust in God's promise? He lived for the fulfilment of God's great will. Can service mean less to him? But let him consider, can he yield himself up wholly to Jehovah, and hold to his Egyptian career? Can he take part in the great processions to the temple of Amon at Karnak? Can he launch into conquests whose only end was to glorify the gods of the land? Can he plunge into that riot of blood and intrigue in which his companions spent their days? Can he, like his unvisited heathen neighbours, gratify every passion, and think to win the praise of grateful deities by a mere presentation of the spoils of war? What would such a life be to him? The writer of Hebrews crystallizes in one word what grew to be the conviction of Moses' heart. It would be sin. No matter what the pleasure, the dignity, the honour of it, such a life would be sin—breaking with that holy God!

As the issue presses itself upon his reluctant soul, he sees, with whatever regret, that there is but one course for him. Again the writer of Hebrews pierces to the centre. It was no mere accident this renunciation. There was a distinct deliberate choice in the depths of Moses' soul. He chose to suffer affliction with the people of God. They might be begrimed with mud, they might now be crushed to the earth with an insupportable tyranny, but they were the people of God. Ay, and as through this voluntary renunciation he became in thought identified with their God and them, even his natural regrets began to fade away.

What was he leaving behind? Enormous treasures? Yes, all those things by which wealth and power can minister to the pleasure of men. But, after all, these are only a limited good. There are blessings which bulk far larger before the spirit of man. If Egypt had the present, these Hebrews had the future. In all that vast system of Egyptian religion, there was no living breath of God, no forward-reaching thought. But here was this mighty hope in the heart of the Jewish faith. Rameses was straining well-nigh Godlike energies to maintain the present frame of empire; and, as became more and more apparent, was staggering under the too vast orb of his fate. But what said El Shaddai to Abraham? 'In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' Moses did not see the humiliation of his brethren, now that the aureole of this hope hung over their heads. His thought is carried down the centuries, and, even in the dim light in which he stands, he can discern that the empire and the glory which Jehovah will give to His suffering

people cannot be like this of Egypt, a material sovereignty alone. Their very sufferings are witness that He is training them for better things. In what way Abraham's God will bless the world by them, he only dimly sees. In the light of all the religious instincts within him, he is beholding Christ's day afar off. And despite its present reproach, he takes the cause of God, the cause of humanity, (as it came afterwards to be seen to be) the cause of Christ, to his heart.

He did not murmur, as if he had made a sacrifice. He did not whine, as if he suffered loss. He felt he was going for the noblest good. This reproach of Christ was greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Yet, what was he giving up? Turn to the simple narrative of Exodus. How antique in its simplicity! No analysis of motive, no revelation of soul, though the bare words reveal much to the seeing eye. We read that he went out unto his brethren, perhaps during the ferment of these inner conflicts, or as they were being resolved into decisions. And here he had to learn in bitter humiliation that if it be much to renounce all for God, a man cannot serve in the strength of his own renunciation. He has learned the great first lesson of grace, that we must leave all to follow God. But he has much to unlearn ere he becomes the empty vessel which God can use.

Here we have the meanings of that painful scene. God leaves Moses to the ferment of his own soul. He acts for God in the hasty, vengeful spirit of the flesh, slaying that Egyptian. What discipline he needs to become the servant which he afterwards became! And as he is heady in passion, so is he precipitate in fear, the moment his act is discovered.

A man who stands for God is weaker than other men, except as he is yielded to the will and living by the power of God.

The one sign of God's favour is in the sword-flash which cut him clean from Egypt. See him fleeing to the desert, a broken, penniless, exiled man! But cease your regrets; things are not what they seem. Good though God was, in giving him for forty years the glory and treasure of Egypt, He was kinder in at one fell sweep taking these outward benefits away. Such trials are honours which God keeps for His very own, creative hours when the whole being is lifted to a loftier plane. Hast thou never heard God say, 'Sell all thou hast; follow Me'? Is it thy joy to fill thyself with the husks of the world, with the mere elegancies and occupations of the earth? Then thou art a poor—a despicably poor creature, though thou wert on a throne. Hast thou the world, ay, but thou hast lost God! By all that is noble in man look on this sight. A WORLD WELL LOST, BECAUSE GOD IS FOUND.

III

MOSES IN MIDIAN

EXODUS ii. 15-22.

How speaking are the silences of Scripture! We have to do at this time with what is merely a transition from one great period to another. And yet, if, from opposite sides, we bring near in our thought fragments of Old Testament narrative and New Testament commentary, there will break forth upon us flashes of soul-revelation, lighting up the deeps of character and the foundations of faith.

We paused at the edge of a terrible crisis. Drawn by a strong patriotic impulse, Moses had essayed to help his brethren, only to find himself baffled in his endeavours, and discovered, in what must have appeared to every Egyptian, his treasonable aim. When he found himself repelled by those whom he essayed to help, especially when he stood roundly charged with murder by a kinsman of his own, he would at once perceive how critical his circumstances were. No feeling of panic, however, assailed his breast. Had he been so minded, he might have had opportunity to regain the favour of his king. The slaughter of an Egyptian, especially by a Hebrew, and in defence of a Hebrew, was a grievous offence;—but not too grievous to be forgiven to one so great as Moses. But as

we may believe, in an instantaneous flash of thought—such as come to us all in critical moments—Moses sees what is involved. The Hebrews were a people suspect. Before now he may have been made to feel, as ancient records testify, that he himself was suspect because of his connection with that accursed people. If he is to be pardoned, for what had the very ugly appearance of a Hebrew conspiracy, most unquestionably he must make it very plain that he has no such design; that it is his purpose to live and die a loyal supporter of the Egyptian state. Can he give such a pledge? Can he go back to the silken ease and dazzling dignities of his former condition, renouncing connection with his people, giving up as futile every hope of their deliverance, casting aside, as an illusion, what had charmed him from his youth—the possible fulfilment even through him of God's promise to his fathers?

In this trial hour, when everything to life itself lay in the balance, he had to choose. And he could not conceal from himself what were the issues. If he cannot renounce his kindred and his God, he must forfeit all. He can have no resource against the might of Egypt but instant hasty flight. It is easy to speak of such things in the quiet of a sanctuary; but for one who had lived to mature life in the state of a king suddenly to be confronted with the loss of every earthly possession, with the miseries of a fugitive, the perils of an outcast, the thirst and hunger of an unprovided wayfarer in the pathless desert, is no slight trial. Then what hope could he cherish, who had blundered so foolishly in his first attempt, of effecting the slightest benefit to Israel by so great a renunciation?

The answer of Moses was the answer of sublime faith. All littleness and subterfuge are far removed from his thought. In face of utter loss, in ignorance of any certain gain, he takes the course of absolute submission. One thing he sees plain as day. Although his foolish action may have been the occasion, God has brought him into this valley of decision. He makes up his mind, fixes his resolve, and braces his being to execute that resolve, looking away to, taking counsel with, casting himself on, the Invisible One. Who of us knows anything of this? Have you ever been brought into a dread place of decision, where, fronting the Eternal, you had to choose between Him and all the world? What was your decision? On which side of the line do you stand? Whatever you may think, whatever may be your main interests, that is the absolutely determining circumstance in your life. Perhaps you have dreaded, as even Moses may at the time have dreaded, the coming of a season of spiritual conflict as a great misfortune. You would shirk the crisis if you could. But you may sooner far outrun your shadow. For the emergence of this supreme question marks the hour of your spiritual majority. Others have been deciding for you hitherto. You must now definitely, finally, irrevocably, decide for yourself. And henceforth you must be the poor man—poor though you had all the treasures of Egypt—who has lost God, or the rich man who, having lost all, has found Him.

One thing is fixed. He cannot conceal his supreme devotion to the chosen people. He cannot palter and temporise in the hope of subsequently finding a better opportunity for carrying out his designs. Never till now, when he has been called to choose between his

people and Egypt, has he known the depth of his feeling, the strength of his hope, how really he had been alien in spirit to that heathen life amid which he had lived. Without a moment's hesitation, then, he elected to stand by his people, and consented to the forfeiture of all his honours. His prospects were indeed very dark. He had no hope of accomplishing aught, immediately, by this sacrifice. Having broken with Egypt, to save his life, he must fly beyond the sweep of her wide-extended power. Still all was in the divine hand. God had brought him into this crisis ; and since everything had been given up, in the faith of His promise, and in submission to His will, He would see to the fulfilment of His own designs. Never in the history of the world has there been evinced a more absolute rest in the word and will of God. Moses did not enjoy as Abraham enjoyed, at least in this early stage, direct communications with the Divine. The promises on which he built his confidence were several centuries old,—those which had been given to Abraham and his sons. But simply received, as words of the Eternal, these transfigured his life, raising it to such a height of faith. In our day men are compassing sea and land, the world of affairs and the world of thought, to secure distinction, even the external reflection of greatness, in the sight of their fellow-men. Would God they might learn how truly, not merely the appearance, but the reality of greatness, is at their feet. In familiar words of Scripture, in statements of holy writ to which they scornfully close their ears, as if they were too simple for their august intellects to entertain, there is to a true and humble faith an elixir which could raise their spirits from the trivial and the transitory to that high plane

of a life in and with God, where all the saints have lived.

‘He forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, enduring as seeing Him who is invisible.’ Making such rapid preparations as were possible, he fled eastward, till he struck the gulf of Suez, and then southward toward the Sinaitic peninsula. What his thoughts would be, we can only dimly realise. Hastening to elude the Egyptian posts, which might soon be on his track, beaten upon by the fiery rays of day, and lying by night on the ground, he would have incursions of sad thought. But the faith that was strong to decide would be strong to maintain. Even his faith, however, did not enable him once to discern the glory of fulfilment for which God was preparing him. Forty years hence he would be passing over these plains to the sea, but in circumstances how strangely changed:—Egypt behind him paralysed with grief, Israel escaped from bondage, pressing on with him to liberty and promise, the Red Sea opening wide her gates to let them cross, and their following foes whelmed in the mighty deep. So able is our God to do exceedingly above what we can ask or think.

And now, as he passes on his way, let us pause, and in the light of the future look at this transition, in the history of one who has interest for all time. Which of these two spaces of forty years astonishes you most? There have been days when men would be most struck, with the fact that a servant of God should, for the service of God, need a pagan culture of forty years. In our time, with our even exaggerated sense of the value of culture, that is regarded as a matter of course. Even we, however,

are not impressed as we should be with one aspect of that fact. Egyptian astronomy, mathematics, priestly lore, rhetoric, and poetic art, served their highest end when they disciplined Moses for his sacred career. Having no future in themselves, they ministered in and through him to the highest life of the ages yet to come. And not only on this occasion, but many times since, great intellectual movements have reached their highest permanent end, in preparing the way for further developments of the spiritual life of man. The meeting of Greek and Hebrew thought, before the coming of Christ, in Alexandria, had, for highest permanent outcome, the preparation of the Greek language, to be the vehicle of what was at root a Hebrew revelation. The Renaissance in Europe soon failed as an elevating movement for the human spirit, but lived on in the Reformation which it suggested and helped.

All this we are prepared to admit. But what shall we say of these forty years in the wilderness? To not a few business men who regard, in their employees at least, old age as the one unpardonable sin, and who rush immature lads, regardless of the stunting and straining influence upon their undeveloped natures, into work only fit for persons of mature years, such a long spell of mooning after a few worthless sheep must seem a sinful waste of time. Ah, as one thinks of this small worldly wisdom, that wrecks nothing of the normal development of intellect, and judgment, and the higher life in its workers, but only of the earliest moment when their energies are coinable into gold, one feels how truly godless is much of our so-called Christian civilisation. As Browning says—

‘That low man sees a little thing to do, sees it and does it ;
This high man with a great thing to pursue, dies ere he
knows it.
That has the world here ; should he need the next, let the
world mind him.
This throws himself on God, and unperplexed seeking shall
find Him.’

Forty years were none too long, in the thought of God, to discipline Moses in one thing—recognition of and submission to the Supreme Will. We who juggle with words as things, may deem that an easy, or if not altogether easy, a brief task. But for a man who has to accept great responsibility at the call of God, who has to face enormous risks at God’s bare word, who has to support on his single shoulder the burden of a nation’s needs, who has to mould a million clashing minds to one conclusion of faith, and bow their stubborn, impatient wills to God’s often trying command, the discipline necessarily involved is of the most extensive and heart-searching description.

Let us follow him on his onward course. After sighting the blue waters of the sea, and crossing over into Asia somewhere above Suez, *i.e.* above where that city now stands, he would travel southward toward the mountains of Sinai, on much the same track as that which he afterwards pursued. Toiling through the desert sand, the blazing sun overhead, around untenanted desolation, before him but endless stretches of featureless waste such as he had passed, he would have time and material for thought. What a mighty change is this which has come upon him as in a moment ! How unwelcome this deadly glare to one accustomed to the cool colonnades of a palace

home ! How wearisome this slow monotonous tramp, to one whose joy would have been to guide from a well-fitted chariot his prancing steeds ! It was not possible for that human nature, which is in great as in small, to be entirely free from regret. How the mighty Nile, and the waving palms, and the palaces, and temples, and avenues of imperial Memphis would rise in all their inviting splendour before his view ! He would recall the tenor of his daily life. Just at this hour what would he have been doing ? Mayhap having an audience of the mighty Rameses ; or sweeping with a vast procession of priests through the awful gloom of forest-like temples, with their hundreds of mounting columns ; or taking an exciting part in the splendid array of military exercise and mimic war, a prince among the people, worshipped almost as a god, the cynosure of every eye. And now he is a fugitive, a beggar, fainting in the greatness of his way, not knowing how soon a sandstorm may arise to envelop his lifeless body in its suffocating folds.

What refuge had he from such visitations of regret and grief ? On earth he had not one solitary stay. The whole horizon round, not a ray of comfort broke on his path. What about our troubles, of which we make so much, as compared with these ? Should we not be ashamed of that petulant, self-idolatrous spirit, so ready to hug itself as injured and misunderstood when the least cloud darkens our sky ? With all that food for sorrow and fear alive in his heart, not knowing whither he goes, equally ignorant how or when relief is to come, he plods on. Sublime plodding ! every step is a victory of faith. Ah, how sadly we mistake ! We think that we show our trust in God most by our loud outcries of prayer. But that is not

so, for oftenest we best prove our faith by going on in the path of obedience, without a word or sign. When in their storm-tossed craft the disciples assailed the sleeping Christ, Jesus, having first calmed the storm, said, 'Why are ye so fearful? How is it ye have no faith?' Faith in that instance would have been standing by the tiller, holding to the oars, and letting Christ sleep on. The world does not know its heroes of faith. Amid the babble of contending creeds, and the rush of new movements, and the loud professions of the prophets of the hour, they are holding on, steady as the stars, putting their faith into deeds of principle, self-sacrifice, and love.

Every step, we said, was a step of faith; ay, and every mile was measured out to him as a discipline. To learn some lessons aright, so much against the grain are they, we need the ministry of compulsion. Some of us have been taught truths on our backs, in the sickroom, which we would never have learned in the school. And in the stern arena of isolation, poverty, hardship, protracted through more than a generation of this mortal life, Moses was disciplined in submission to God. How his heart would go out to that invisible Jehovah, deprived of every other refuge! How the stories told him in childhood, but half forgotten amid the stir and bustle of later life, would rise up in fresh and living power, giving him warrant to come as Abraham and Jacob came, giving assurance that he would not be disappointed. Then in these wilds, and afterwards amid the rocky solitude of Sinai, he would be face to face with that perennial unveiling of the divine in His works. If the ninetieth Psalm reflect thoughts which once lived and burned in the heart of Moses, then we have some clue to

what may have been present to his mind in these years,—for what comes out in a great poem are not the surface thoughts of the hour, but the deep stable convictions of the life. As one turns to this song of the ages, he is startled to find how it fits into this scene. Ages separate him from the great patriarchs, in whose footsteps he is walking, having given up everything to realise their faith. But God is the dwelling-place of His own in all generations. He wanders under the beetling brows of those enormous mountain-masses of Sinai—symbols, if such there be on earth, of an unchanging eternity. But this God in whom he rests, even as his fathers rested, is the Self-existent, in whose everlasting sameness the ages of the mountains, and even of earth, are dwindled to a span. Small wonder if in this august presence he should be smitten with the thought of the evanescence of man, and of his worthlessness—with earnest longing that God might reveal something of His glory and power.

But we are anticipating. Let us follow Moses on his journey. Leaving the desert, he would at length come among the mountains of Sinai. Travelling through them, he at last draws near the shore of the eastern gulf along which the Midianites lived. And now ensues one of those simple incidents by which God, in all ages, lets His people see that He is about their path and their lying down. Every element in the situation seems to be so contrived as to awaken hope and confidence. At the close of a journey, the wearied wayfarer takes up his abode by the grateful greenness of some desert fountain. Here ensued a scene of daily occurrence in that early patriarchal world. Flocks draw near to drink of the refreshing waters

and, with them, shepherds and shépherdesses. How pleasing to have intercourse with his kind once more! It would be an hour of elation and stirring of heart. Did some faint reminiscence come stealing across his mind, of similar scenes in the histories of the patriarchs, and of divine help associated with them? God often uses even the faintest trains of memory to stir us into preparation for His purposes. The opportunity, however, came in the actual emergency of the moment. The shepherds were wild, half-savage men, without one pulse of chivalry, and eager to contest priority at the water-troughs even with the daughters of Reuel the priest. Noble in every thought, and revealing in a sudden flash of unpremeditated action, his commanding personality, he swept the shepherds aside, drew water, and watered the flock. It was the act of a moment, the impulse of a great heart; and without one thought of merit or reward he retired to his solitude when he was done. The shepherds depart, churlishly desiring nothing more to do with this masterful man. Even the shepherdesses, though grateful, cannot summon courage to offer hospitality. But seven pairs of sharp feminine eyes have been upon Moses, and their owners hasten home with a full description of his person, and inventory of his dress. The first picture we get of Moses is through these women's eyes. They knew Egyptians, for representatives of the Pharaohs often came into that quarter in search for turquoises or to work mines; and noting the costly raiment of an Egyptian noble, in which Moses had fled, and which, dusty and frayed, he still wore, they knew that they were face to face with a dignitary of the imperial race, whom all feared. 'An Egyptian

delivered us,' cried they, glad to have so great a thing to tell.

Moses came into contact, in Reuel, with a representative of that traditional knowledge of the true God which still lingered on in remote places, during those early ages of the world. Ever and anon, antique figures step out of the mists of time, who have a light of God—not derivable from the special revelation to patriarchs, but which must have come down from some primitive source. Such men were Terah, and Melchizedek, and such was Reuel. When, in the fast gathering twilight, Moses was led into this sage's homestead, how he must have joyed to find himself among worshippers of the true God! Assuredly his trust had not been in vain. With how great a deliverance God had delivered him! That he had found real sympathy with his faith in the aged priest and his family; that they came to esteem him as one with themselves in the worship and service of God, is evident from the fact that, at Reuel's instance, Moses marries Zipporah.

Still amid all the joys of home-life and the stir of his pastoral employment, there is evidence that he was not at rest. He could not altogether make his home with the good Reuel, and settle down to be sheikh of a wandering tribe. He had hopes which they did not share. Their lingering traditions from the morning of time would in the course of ages have dissipated into a somewhat vague, if morally constraining, memory. They knew nothing of God's appearance to Abraham. In his promise of world-wide blessing through the chosen race they had no direct share. All that was most living and powerful in his spiritual experience, Moses had to keep to him-

self. And so, even in the first joy of paternity, when his heart would be strongly knit to the mother of his first-born, his predominant feeling is one of isolation, and he calls his boy Gershom, a stranger in a strange land.

But there is a bright side to that feeling of isolation. His dissatisfaction and unrest in the present show that his eagle-like spirit is rising up to greet the future. He has not forgotten his miraculous preservation in infancy. Surely Jehovah, in intervening so manifestly, has preserved him for some great end! Was it for nought that He opened up to the Hebrew child, devoted to death, the treasures and culture of Egypt? To whom could be traced the stirring in his heart toward his people but to God? And although his first effort failed, did not the promise of God stand? Did not God say to Abraham, that after his children had served another nation for four hundred years, they would come out with great substance? And, crowning all, giving strength and urgency to hope, must not Moses have felt stirring within him something of the regal capacities which afterwards he revealed?

And so he lived in the present, and even narrowed down to the influences of the present,—for mighty are circumstances with us all,—but not without soarings of thought into the heights of God's purpose, and visitations of heart-enchaining hope. No one would be more faithful for the hour than this great heart, with his eye on the distant years. Every part of Reuel's affairs would feel his quickening, regulating influence. The man who saw God afterwards on Sinai's brow, would for many years see to every detail of his humble calling around Sinai's base. There is

nothing small in a life regulated by true submission to God. The motive of lowly service may raise that service to an equality with the highest. And many a humble saint, to whom God gave nought but servile work, may yet rank with princes in His eternal kingdom.

Are there any, reading these words, to whom the years of their spiritual life have brought nothing but trial, loss, weary waiting, without even yet a lightening of the gloom? Your careless were your happy years. Whereas in your distress you have often in later times been nigh to say, 'Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart, and washed my hands in innocency.' But now, witnessing the fierce trial of a Moses, and remembering the glorious triumph for which the trial prepared, shall you not be strong to endure? See the end of the Lord. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy. When I am tried, I shall come forth as gold.

Does it grieve any of us that we are dwelling in Midian, amid the rude naturalism of human selfishness on the one hand, and on the other the strait, unexpansive, traditional creed of a formal and stationary faith? How much religion is a mere tradition, something which our fathers believed, and which we believe because they believed, but without profound living conviction, forward-pressing enthusiasm, or over-mastering hope! How miserably in the dawn of unequalled opportunity millions of Christians are jogging on, indifferent to the possibilities of world-evangelisation, which God has brought to our doors! With every avenue of opportunity shut, confined to rude mechanic toil, Moses lived in the thought of

that promise to be fulfilled. Let us live in the gathering dawn of coming triumph, let us watch for the reddening glare of the bridegroom's torches, even though so many be still asleep. 'The vision is yet for an appointed time,' and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie; though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not delay.'

IV

THE BURNING BUSH

EXODUS ii. 23—iii. 10.

THE scene shifts twice to-day—back to Egypt—leaving Moses in the silence of the desert; and then it opens again on the mountain splendours of Sinai, when the hour of deliverance is near to strike.

‘It came to pass in process of time that the king of Egypt died.’ That was Rameses II., according to the prevailing opinion among those best entitled to judge, a monarch who surely has enjoyed an almost unique destiny. A world-conqueror more than three thousand years ago, pushing his victorious arms into the passes of Lebanon and on to the confines of Assyria; a self-idolater perhaps, unsurpassed in the magnificence of his creations to his own honour, having covered Egypt from the sea to far Nubia with edifices, monuments, inscriptions setting forth his praise, he and his achievements have escaped the tooth of time, which has devoured every relic of far later conquerors, and exist with wonderful completeness to the present day. Travellers in Egypt come across traces of him everywhere—temples, monolith statues, the Iliad of his victories, blazoned on temple walls, his treaties with his conquered foes, written with chisel on the rock for ever, his dedications to

the gods similarly immortalised, and brimful of his own glory and beneficence, great colossi cut into the living rock serving for a gateway to the vast temple of Ipsambul hewn into the heart of the hill. Last of all, we have the man himself recovered but yesterday from the grave, and lying unveiled in the statuesque repose of death in the Gizeh Museum.

And yet all this survives merely to show the worthlessness and evanescence of the most towering greatness based on egoism and force. Even this immense activity and self-display, contributed nothing to the good of humanity, to the future of the world. The whole is a barren wonder without an atom of abiding result. Where alone he touches the future and affects the moral progress of the world is at a point of which he never thought. His insatiate vanity, hounding him to ever more extensive works, made him an oppressor. By the augmenting severity of his exactions he stung the dumb, passive Israelites to impatience, to renewed faith in God, to prayer, and so indirectly brought on their deliverance. Ay, many that are first shall be last, and the last first. The future was bound up with the history and hopes of the children of Israel, whom he tramped like the mire beneath his feet. And the discipline of Egypt being now, so far as was necessary, absorbed by Israel, this world-hero was but a goad in God's hands to rouse them into expectation of divine promise.

The children of Israel cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of their bondage. The dumb centuries had done their work of welding them into a unity, shaping them into a settled civilisation, inuring them to hard toil; and now the permitted pressure of cruel despotism stirred the dormant

impulses of faith within them and prompted an incessant cry to God. And Jehovah heard their groaning—not merely the bleat and wail of unavailing grief, but groaning in which there was some sigh of aspiration, some reviving of holy memory, some vague longing and expectation of coming good. And God remembered ;—not that He had ever forgotten,—but there is a memory of opportunity, when the hour comes for the realisation of our will, as well as a memory which is a recovery from oblivion. Here, on earth, now are the moral conditions (in germ at least) for the fulfilment of His purpose. And so that covenant, made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which God has been keeping in His thought, can come into practical operation on the stage of history. These God-forsaken bondslaves are henceforth to be known as God's peculiar treasure, His own covenant people, since there is now some dawning of the covenant spirit in them. God looked upon them,—He had respect unto them.

What mysteries of the present do these historic words illumine ! How much of that identical covenant of God remains to this hour unfulfilled ! Remember the words to Abraham, 'In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' Poor blinded Africans, and opium-sodden Chinese, they know even less than captive Israel of the divine destiny of blessing hanging over them. And as we read the history of our own European civilisation for more than a thousand years, marked by the strifes of dynasties, plottings, and counter plottings, incessant wars, popular risings, revolutions, slave-trades, and such like, we might think that this covenant had been passed from and existed no longer. God Himself

seemed to have forgotten utterly. ' When, however, a hundred years ago, in solitary souls like Carey's, faith in God's promise began to be realised ; the fact that God had not forgotten, but was holding to His covenant, became manifest to all. From behind the clouds and darkness, He stood revealed in glorious fulfilment of His world-old promise,—Fiji, Madagascar, Japan, being mile-stones marking His beneficent march, to the literal fulfilment of a world blessed in His Son. And had we only faith to prove Him, so that He could look upon us as persons who were fit to be the covenant agents of His purpose, and to whom He could communicate His grace and power, what earnest might He not give us, not only among the heathen, but in our own streets, of mighty blessing, in drunkenness banished, in uncleanness purged out as by holy fire, in that godless, gambling spirit, hydra-headed in its manifestations, smitten to death by the Hercules of conscience clothed in the armour of Christ. Remember that in this day, as well as in the time of Moses, God has arisen, and is present here and now, to fulfil to us the fulness of this covenant promise. What alone hinders are the limitations and the flaggings of our faith.

But while, in Goshen, this stirring of the sere heart of Israel is in progress, God is even now preparing the instrument of deliverance. Old Reuel having died, Jethro has succeeded to the headship of the family and the hereditary priesthood, and Moses was his chief herdsman. The word translated 'father-in-law' really means relation by marriage, and, as other instances in the Bible show, is applicable to brother-in-law as well as father-in-law. Thirty or forty years have intervened since last we looked upon Moses,

during which he has been a herdsman on these wilds. We have but one certain clue to his thoughts in these solitary years. Long after this period we learn, quite incidentally, that God had given him another son. And what were his thoughts in that hour? Did loneliness crush his soul, as when Gershom was born? Is he bowed down by the failure of his endeavour and the frustration of his career? No, at last he has turned to the bright side. He is thinking far less of himself and far more of God's deliverances. His father's God had shielded him in infancy, had rescued him from Pharaoh in time of peril. And so when he took the little soft body of his boy out of Zipporah's hands, he breathed his heart's trust upon it in the name Eliezer, 'my God and help'—and then, turning to the household, he said, 'For the God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.' Ah, not only are the people becoming ripe to be delivered, but this great heart, leaning all its weight on God, is getting ready to be used in that service.

Still things are not hurried. Moses goes on as he had been going. It was no great hardship, even to him, to have honest work and plenty of it. What respect both covenants put upon work!—Adam a gardener, Moses, like the patriarchs, a shepherd, Jesus a carpenter, John a fisherman, and Paul a maker of tents. With such prototypes, the working man, if he be true to himself and to his God, walks this world, no serf nor bondman, but on one platform with the highest and the best, as respects all the rights and duties of citizenship, and with a free field to rise into every sphere of service and win every kind of reward. Following his rude mechanic task, Moses was led on

to his great career. As the summer drew on, the herbage about the coast grew bare, and so the shepherds were wont to drive their flocks back into the desert, till through tortuous valleys they came among the immense mountain-masses of Sinai, with peaks, riven and precipitous, running up to six, eight, and nearly ten thousand feet, at the base of which water was plenteous and forage abundant. Wandering on, guided by the needs of his flock, Moses comes unwittingly to the place which was to become the great scene of his own life, and from that future day one of the chief landmarks in the onward march of man. He is wandering in the plain of Er Rahah, and yonder is Ras Sufsafeh from which the law was given.

Ignorant of all this, and with his immediate anxieties concentrated on his flock, Moses settles down, a mere herdsman, in that valley, now so still, save for the bleating of his sheep, whither he should come, with a nation behind him; where in thunderings and lightnings and a great voice, God would reveal His awful majesty; from which he, the ere-while herdsman, should rise to stand between God and men as no mere man had ever stood—beholding His glory and receiving, in precept and statute, His eternal will. Was there ever such a contrast of circumstances since the world began? Yet is there a lesson here for the humblest of the children of men. If we only lay in God's hand as Moses lay, if we made Him our help as Moses did, who can tell to what service He might lift us up, even from the mason's trowel, the shepherd's crook, and the clerk's pen?

But what is this sight that suddenly attracts his gaze? Off his path somewhat, a low, stunted acacia

bush is seen enveloped in flames. Arrested he hardly knows how, he waits to see the glowing embers fall down. But, strange to say, while the flames leap through and through the branches, the bush remains unconsumed. It is a manifest portent, and as such, rouses profoundest wonder. Of course we cannot hinder the rationalist from saying that this is a legend, a mythical embodiment of some spiritual truth, a dream. We suppose in many past generations, thoughts like these have crossed the minds of men. And the story seems naked and defenceless in its brief simplicity. But somehow the story lives, wins the allegiance of reasonable people, has behind it the authority of the universal Church, declaring this to be an integral part of the Word of God. Life rehabilitates, what the overweening intellect would cast away. In such extraordinary events there is a depth of symbolical significance, which makes them a living revelation of God, not only to an immediate witness, but to all spiritual men. They have, in other words, so perennial a meaning for the deepest life of the soul, that they stand forth clearly defined to the religious consciousness, not fond dreams of man, but deep central thoughts of God.

Look how this vision bodies the divine idea of the present situation. The low thorny bush is humble, despised Israel. Those fierce flames, in one aspect, are a picture of the terrible oppression which threatened to consume them off the face of the earth. But contrariwise, the unconsumed branches show plainly that this is not a fire of earth to destroy, but a fire of heaven to purge. And so there is shadowed forth the thought which existed in no mind but God's, that these persecutions were purifying fires to fit them

for a great career. The spectacle has as divine an unexpectedness and originality, as the message which it accompanies. Indeed, they fit in like lock and key, and both are divine.

But as showing the enormous gulf which separates this incident, so original and fertile, from the cloud-born children of man's fancy, we may add that from that far distant day to this no generation has passed, in which religious men have not been compelled by their own living experience to acknowledge this incident, as a symbol of the way in which the divine finds a lodgement in earth-burdened and time-bounded lives. Let the reader glance over his past, and we will venture an allegation which we believe his experience will bear out. Where is there a man or a woman who has not been at one time or another arrested by the sudden outshining of spiritual light and power? It might be from the heart of some worldly circle or circumstance, in a business transaction, or in a game, or in social life. The circumstances might be quite common, but visibly to your eye there flashed forth, in a display of conscience, or purity, or forgiving love, something which reminded you of God; and you went home with an awe of the divine upon you, such as you may never have had before, saying to yourself, 'After all, religion is real; its concerns are supreme.' Away with that hypothesis of legend! Here you have a divine figurative emblem of a wholly divine fact,—I mean the way in which the Holy Ghost, in His great world-wide work of conviction, causes earthly circumstances to arouse thoughts of the Eternal, and, in the language of the poet, 'makes every common bush a-fire with God.'

Alas, in how many lives the witness thus kindled is

suffered to die out unimproved! How many poor human beings, sinking down into worldliness, are the graves of stifled impressions and conquered resolves! Moses, however, acts upon his first impulse of wonder. He did not belittle the profounder impressions and forecasts of his spirit. Much less did he explain them away. Believing that this fact, so far out of the natural order, was charged with a special meaning, he said, 'I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.'

'He maketh His ministers a flame of fire.' But Jehovah Himself is in and with His angels, and they represent Him. Hence the words of verse 4, 'And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see.' Jehovah watches to discover if this sight awakens any responsive chord in Moses. What a thought visits the heart at this point—of God watching over us, to note whether we respond to the influences by which He tests our souls! And as Moses draws near—yea, the moment that he turned aside, He who was the Omnipotent One over the universe as well as Covenant-God, called from the midst of that holy searching flame, 'Moses, Moses!' How these words must have rung in that mountain-girt valley! The first direct utterance of God! How it must have sounded through every chamber of his soul! But let us turn from the mystery of this cry to what is easier to be understood, Moses' response. Taut like a harp-string, Moses' soul rings out at the first touch of God's finger, 'Here am I.' Faith has been growing, consecration deepening, hope soaring again in these silent years. Oh to be strung for a divine call as Moses was!

But there is one lesson which the saint can only

learn in God's immediate presence—His awful holiness. Do not our consciences bear witness how even in our consecrations, in our services for God, little touches of our unclean, over-weening *ego* come in? Even Moses may have had something of his old precipitancy and impetuosity in this approach. And so he is arrested by this voice, 'Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' God's is an ineffable holiness, from which the highest servant must stand far off. Man can only come in utter lowliness and naked simplicity into that Presence. Have we felt this, have we been compelled to lay aside everything—all creature trusts, all self-sufficiencies, all elements of distinction from our fellow-men, and to come lowly and empty, on the footing of our mere humanity, and at God's call to be used as He may be pleased, while He is pleased? Then we know something of His service; but if not, nothing. Since the world began, God has never used, for the immediate fulfilment of His will, souls of another temper than this. These may be employed in subordinate and secondary tasks; but only the utterly humble, to whom God's holiness is the central all-spanning conviction, who feel shrivelled up into nothing before Him, who fall at His feet as dead, and act only as they are empowered, directed, limited by His simple will, can be the channels of His power, the utterers of His living Word, the agents of His purposes among men.

And now how can we realise the full meaning of the scene which ensues? All the figures to which one has recourse fail in comparison. For over three-score and ten years Moses has been cherishing faith in God. For well-nigh forty of these, having risked

everything in devotion to God, he has been sustained by confidence in the divine promise alone. And we have tried to fashion to ourselves something of the struggle and conflict through which he had passed. Was it an easy thing, could it have been other than intensely trying, to live right on, in the face of present impossibilities, on the strength of words spoken to his fathers many centuries ago? We know something of the hardness of that, who are trusting for an overthrow of social evils, at this hour entrenched in a virtual omnipotence, to the promise and power of God. Nevertheless, Moses had trusted on, these long long years, sometimes hard enough bestead and like to give up; but he could not renounce his father's faith, he could not ignore the deliverance which God had wrought, he could not forget that promise spoken to Abraham and his descendants, which seemed instinct with a meaning divine. And so, closing his eyes to what men call facts, he threw himself out on the words of the Eternal God.

Ay, faith is trying, but even here there come hours of vision and fruition. God, who has not broken the silence of four hundred years, is speaking! And in the words thrilling to the centre of Moses' being, what a glorious authentication of His faith—'I, the God of thy father.' God, when He speaks, always strikes home to the inmost experience of His child. That faith of thy father and mother in preserving thee was of Me. I was thy parents' God. They acted as guided by Me. And then the lightning played back over the centuries to the founding of their race. 'I, the God of Abraham.' He who spoke to Abraham—does not the story live in his thought?—is speaking to him. The Fear of Isaac, the Bethel

God of Jacob, the Watcher of his long captivity, the Penue! Wrestler; He who had taught and searched and blessed His own, breaking the dread silence, is pouring these words into his ear!

‘And Moses hid his face.’ It was not the brilliance of the fire. He could endure that. It was the sudden burst of soul-enflaming conception which took possession of his mind; and then, with the overwhelming sense of glory, came natural fear. He was afraid to look upon God. Ah, reader, let us put off our shoes. These experiences may appear to us very strange. The like of them may never visit tame souls in the smooth and limited paddock of their daily routine. But they stand authenticated by their sublime results. These hours of God’s unveiling are the great moments in the moral history of man. Whom would we believe, if not Moses, when he opens to us those heart experiences, which were the generating fires of his world-compelling life? Great though the marvel be of a man’s experiencing these things, it would be a darker and more painful mystery to find one who, with such a power to realise, had a will to deceive.

And, now, to this shepherd abased in the dust, God begins to unveil the counsel of His Will. What a rare thing that is, at least on this high level! You will find hundreds of clever men, skilled in working up the Church’s teaching in all forms—literary, philosophical, historical—about whom no man ever feels that they have a fire of God burning in their bones, a message for the Eternal which they must speak. Then there are, now and again, shining souls whom God has taken apart, to whom He has given words for their own time—Chalmerses, Erskines, Rutherford. Only to one man, in all our history, did God

give broader counsels, covering all our future, and that was to John Knox, who, once for all, laid the main lines of our Scottish religious life. But in respect of entering into the counsel of God, Knox is a babe to Moses. He only made current in this Scottish land, the Reformed faith, which he had absorbed. Moses was a Prometheus, who, in the infancy of the race, and amid the grossness of material religion, brought down the seminal conceptions of spiritual religion from heaven. Through the counsel of God into which he rose, and as agent of the Divine Will, he has affected the entire future of God's universal kingdom. By and by, we shall be face to face with marvellous signs and wonders, and it will be well to have fixed in our minds on behalf of what they were called forth.

Meantime, turn to God's present declarations. We find in them three things—a glance to the past, an outlook on the future, a call to service. Turning to the past, God does not explain; He leaves His acts to explain themselves. He leaves the four centuries of captivity an unrelieved mystery. But He shows that He has been in the heart of them all the time, alert, active, in most tender sympathy with His own. 'I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt.' Is not that a blessed thought! Even when He does not relieve, He sees; even though He might overlook others, He surely sees His afflicted people. What a steadying thing to have upon us ever our Father's Eye! But, further, 'I have heard their cry'—ay, their simplest plaint of misery, their start of fear, the moan of waking trust, the cry of growing expectation, the pleading of faith. And all these I trace down to their causes, in the wrongs

which they have endured 'by reason of their task-masters.' 'For I know'—it is God who speaks—who, as creatures cannot, sees to the very root of things—it is He who says, 'I know their sorrows.' Oh, suffering saint, you are comprehended of God. He knows all, who loves you with an infinite love. Even while the suffering endures, cannot you lie still?

But, stay, the purpose of God is now ripe. Listen, 'I am come down to deliver'—God in His angel is starting the process of deliverance. We take that literally. God was in human history then. God is in human history now. As we read some lives of our time, in the light of their work, we seem to hear a whisper from beyond the stars, 'I am come down to open Africa, to free the slave.' Another thought,—God moves not till all His plans are formed. In verse 8 we have the whole programme of conquest to the settlement in the promised land. All arrangements have been made, and the Ruler of Providence sees His way to this goal. He works in history through free wills, and thus, circuitously through their freedom, He reaches out to His own ends. As it so happens, we know more of the movements of peoples over the whole East, than any generation since that early day; and we can imagine how God may have been ordering,—depressing Egypt, driving back Assyria, turning Phœnicia westward, allowing the Canaanites to run swiftly to degeneracy, that there might be freedom through centuries for a Jewish Kingdom to grow upon the promised land. The glorious thought for us, however, is that God's promises are not doubtful peradventures, but detailed, definite, certain—as clear in the divine thought as a

geographical chart or historical statute. He even brings the features of the country before the eye of Moses, who, we must remember, may have passed through it in the train of the victorious Rameses, to whet his appetite and stir his hope.

But turn to the call. This is to be the task and responsibility of God. The moment for deliverance has come, and God speaks as if He were pressed by His sense of the Israelites' sufferings. And we may be sure that this speaking as a man, corresponds to something in His divine heart. 'Come now, therefore.' Therefore—because my heart is agonised at these sufferings of Israel—thou art to fulfil my heart's longing by winning them release. What a calling! to satisfy the yearning of the divine heart by delivering men. And yet it is the Gospel preacher's task. 'Now,' such is the divine precipitancy. I cannot wait a moment more, 'Come!'

Formerly Moses acted on a human impulse, but now he is summoned to obey a divine call. And, lo, God is to send him right back to Pharaoh from whom he fled. The path of backsliding, along which our coward self-will made its escape, is always the path on which faith at God's call returns to victory. We shall see after, how Moses trembled at that summons. But even now, he can discern how entirely the conditions are changed. The work is God's work. He chooses whom He wills. He takes the responsibility of securing success if Moses but obey. 'Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt.' Moses is but a servant, to do what God commands, in the faith of God's presence and help.

Here we stay. Moses has much still to learn. But let us in our life's discipline and duty go with him thus far. Self-willed effort is doomed to fail. 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' Let Him speak, and all our wisdom will be to obey.

V

THE CALL OF MOSES

EXODUS iii. 11—iv. 17

WE are coming into the secret place of the soul. As spectators of the inner crisis in Moses' career, we are, in a typical instance, to behold how God still comes near to choose servants for His work; and also by what struggle and agony a human soul rises to the plane of submission and full surrender. The scene is in the unfamiliar East. The circumstances carry us back almost to the morning of the world. But even in this latest age, amid our complicated civilisation, and under our actual burdens of trial, perplexity, and care, there can be no theme more pertinent, touching more immediately our deepest need, or more full of precious lessons for our lives.

The highest truth about every man is that he was made by God, for God, and that he can find no rest till God finds him, and his whole being is yielded up in submission to Him. Hearing the divine call, bowing to the divine will, each soul, rising into new liberty, escapes the bondage of the past, and begins a life of service under divine guidance, and in sole dependence on divine help and grace.

In the close of last lecture we considered the call,

‘Come now, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt.’ In these great words we have the universal principles of every call,—what we might term the law of the called life. First God summons whom He wills, sends him where He wills, marks out specifically what He wills; and revealing these things, as all standing, and standing equally in the divine irreversible purpose, He demands simple submission to His sovereign behest. Many people, reading those tremendous words, are inclined to explain them away. Ah! they say, the man fancied, from some things, that God must be calling: this is only a dream, a judgment, an inference of his own. Not at all. It may be that you have a nature closed against the divine—which God has never stirred. You may be shut up as in the cave of Plato, to shadows of sense, surmises of soul. But as not only Moses, and Isaiah, and some few Biblical characters have found, but also many consecrated workers in the past and in our own times, God has a way of His own into the spirit which He has made. Standing over against all that is in the man, He lays His will upon him. The man wakens to realise that he stands summoned by that Being, in whom he lives and moves and has his being, to specific submission and definite service. Such a consciousness had Abraham, and Jeremiah, and Paul; and in the high places of the field, on Indian plains and Pacific isles, amid the most sunken of our cities, and among the throngs of men, are many who have been thrust out by the pressure of such a divine call, and who are bearing the burden and heat of the day, because of the overpowering conviction that they have been divinely

chosen for, and are being divinely helped in, the work in which they are engaged.

The first conscious feeling of one on whom falls, in this irresistible way, the call of God, is one of overpowering weakness. His past weakness, when he attempted to succour his brethren, rises before Moses—the outflaming of his temper, and then the precipitation of his fear. ‘Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, I who fled from his face? Who am I that I should lead forth Thy people, who was affrighted by the wagging of one rough accusing tongue?’ Clad with the prestige of princely position, disciplined in arms, and with the glory of mature manhood flushing his being, he had pitifully failed. How then as a poor shepherd, a stranger, broken in spirit and far advanced in years, could he dream of success? I wonder, does the reader know aught of this? Have you grovelled before God under the most piteous sense of your own proved weakness—feeling how impossible it must be that you should ever be of service again?

God does not, as might some fond friend, repudiate your self-depreciation. He leads you away from your own merits and demerits to Himself. The rushlight of night is blotted into nothing by the rays of the sun. And man’s nothingness is drowned out of consciousness, in the streaming radiance of divine all-sufficiency. ‘Who am I,’ dost thou say? What matters? Listen, this is the voice of God, ‘Certainly I will be with thee.’ These great railway trucks with their tonnage painted on each, (not to speak of the heavy loads they carry), seem the last things in the world to move at a great speed. But, bound to each other, they are bound by great links to an

engine surcharged with propulsive power, and will soon thunder through sleeping town and hamlet as on the wings of the wind. 'Certainly!' is there any iron link ever forged that can bind with greater security than this word of the Eternal, thrown out that the faith of Moses may hold it fast? 'Certainly I'—the holding is all of God, if Moses will have Him to be His alone source of strength. 'Certainly I will'—look at that link thrown over the hook of your faith! What is it made of? No metal ever dug from earth's womb, and smelted by material fires, but formed and fashioned out of three attributes of God—His unchangeableness, His righteousness, His covenant faithfulness. But our figure is inadequate; for though this link of God's hold of us stood, the hook of our faith might give way. But God does not simply touch us at a point, nor do we grasp Him by one hand. He is round about us as well as in us. He has holds on us when we have once yielded, deeper down than where we can make a conscious response to Him; and grasping us thus, in the all-encompassing, million-rooted hold of His power, He says, 'Certainly, I will be with thee.'

'Therefore I will not fear though the earth be removed.' Who could doubt, leaning on such words of the Most High? But this is a promise which cannot be fulfilled in a day. Many days must pass, numerous steps will have to be taken, in the strength of God's Word, and without one external indication of fulfilment. And further, exalted impressions, such as those of the present hour, cannot continue. By natural reaction, if for no other reason, the soul sinks down to the ordinary levels of life again. The waves of common human probability will close around Moses.

He will be in the world, touched at every point by its common limited views of things, hardly able to realise that God has spoken to him, and that behind the clouds of the visible an achievement and victory are awaiting him, of which there is not now a trace. And so he needs something tangible, actual, on which to rest,—a token to which he may come back again and again, as a sure sign that God will fulfil His word.

‘Things seen are mightier than things heard.’ And so God commits Himself by a visible sign. “Look around on this familiar scene, and up to these beetling, riven brows, so clear and seemingly so near, though lifted thousands of feet into heaven. When the work to which I have called thee is consummated, when thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God on this mountain.” In one sense that was no token till he had actually come back; but in God’s definite and absolute committal to place, if not to time, in the calm assumption of certain and speedy fulfilment, and in the vivid picture, thrown into Moses’ mind, of his return to this actual spot at the head of an emancipated Israel, to worship God, there was kindling for the imagination, a clear conception for the intellect, and heightened assurance springing from so particular and irreversible a promise. Every one who has gone on for any length of time, in simple faith on God’s Word, can appreciate the value of such sustainment as this, can look back and discover, in his own lot, providential hints, suggestions, forecasts, which comforted and upheld him when his faith was like to fail.

These words have stirred Moses. He is roused out of the dull, pastoral routine, and transported in

thought to Goshen again. Remembering the hopeless irresponsiveness of his brethren, he feels that to move them is beyond his power. He must have a message from God,—something that will carry its own witness, direct, immediate, irresistible to every heart. ‘When I come and say, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say, “That is a tremendous claim to make, prove your commission; what is His name?” What shall I say?’ He wanted an unveiling of God direct from Himself, which would be proof to them that God had spoken by him.

And so we come to the greatest revealing centre of Old Testament Scripture, to words which by every sign are no projections of man’s mind out on the Infinite, but the breaking through, from the eternal glory, of a gleam of the divine. There are many points of view from which the great apocalypse of verses 14 and 15 may be considered. Our standpoint is biographic. We want to realise how they would strike Moses, and through him the people, as a new, living, and most heartening message from the Unseen. For that they were all this, the entire sequel shows. The whole Mosaic movement was, in the deepest sense, a tidal wave lifted and sustained by the attraction of this new unveiling of the divine.

Regarding it thus, we shall begin at the end. There are three moments in this revealing name,—like a crystal or diamond, it flashes its glory from three sides. First, we have continuity with the past. Stretching back across four centuries of silence, He who is speaking into his being’s deeps identifies Himself with the God who had appeared to their fathers: ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the

God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, hath sent me unto you.' Nothing more profoundly impresses the soul than the vivid realisation of vast periods of time, and the thought that He who had kept silent for four centuries, that the very God who had environed the life of Abraham, was encompassing him, must have been unutterably sublime. What a concourse of ideas would rush to his mind, what hallowed memories would take shape in that august presence! The lessons of his childhood, the visions of his spirit in hours of secret meditation, his hopes and fears, his questionings and aspirations, through all his great trial and since, would crowd in one conflux of memories into his soul. But the stir and movement of individual reflection are hushed as the great saying goes on. That past is not past. All present, all possible revelations, are rooted in, being expansions of, that first unveiling of God. Even all worships of God yet to come, in the gathering light of the growing divine purpose, will go back to what has been unveiled there. 'This is My Name for ever—this My memorial unto all generations.'

Thus is the past re-authenticated, and brought into the present as having a message for the passing hour, and for all time. But is there nothing new? Traveling up, we now come to a name standing alone in impressive isolation—'I AM.' It has been commonly supposed that that name is uttered now for the first time. But we are inclined to think it may be new, in the sense of its full import being seen for the first time. While it seems to have been used by Abraham, as expressing especially the covenant relation in which God stood to him, yet in the simple immediate relations which God sustained to His

servant in that day, the light that this name threw on God's own nature was not seen. In the hallowed experiences of this hour, however, Moses soars to its meaning. What a being is this God! We pass, but He abides. Our lives are as a vapour, but from age to age He continues unchanged. And while in our brief lives, purposes and resolutions vary from day to day, through age after age He has remained the same. What He was to Abraham, that He is to us, carrying out the same mind, perfecting the same design, incapable of being thwarted or turned. How different from mortal men, acted upon by a thousand external circumstances, changing with every changing situation, limited to the horizons of the moment, is this self-centred, self-determined, self-existent Jehovah! 'I AM'—that simple phrase which expresses existence in its absoluteness, in its timelessness, in its unconditionedness, what a sublime name for God!

Where did Moses get this name? We read much of the influence of Egypt on Israel, but among their nature-deities there were none which could have suggested the name. Recent discovery has proved that ancient Babylonia exerted, even before the days of Moses, a profound influence both on Egypt and Canaan. But between Babylonian representations and that which we have here, there is the profoundest gulf. As a great archæologist tells us, 'Where the Babylonian poet saw the action of deified forces of nature, the Hebrew writer sees only the will of the one supreme God.' And so in the light of even the most recent knowledge, we can assert that in this Name we have an unveiling of the Divine Being by Himself. It has every attribute of a divine communication. It bears no mark of created origin or of

transitory human conditions. There is nothing tribal or local, proving it to be the product of one type of mind. It has commended itself to peoples of all the families of mankind. It has lived on through a thousand revolutions and advances of human thought. The world has not got beyond it still. In essentials the God whom Christendom worships, is this 'I AM,' who first stood self-revealed in Moses' thought.

But the very magnificence of the light falling back upon God, from this name, kindles a new desire. What is this unchanging, self-poised, eternally existing one? What is the quality, the character, the spirit, of this self-determined Deity? Ah! here we are made to feel that we are still but in an early stage of revelation. Not till the coming of Christ shall the riddle be fully read, in these words, 'God is love;' 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' But a most wonderful preliminary unveiling is given in the third side of this great revealing name, 'I AM THAT I AM,' or, as some would now read it, I will be that I will be. Here we have no vain reduplication, but a new, a pertinent, a profoundly moving fact. The great self-existent I AM is coming into the field of history. He is going to reveal what He is, in the history of this people chosen to be His own. What I am to you in every act of Mine, what I will be in every future dealing with you, has its root in Myself. Step by step in My dealing with My chosen people, the qualities of My inmost nature will stand out in relief. I AM THAT I AM.

What a revelation, reaching back to the furthest past of their covenant history, carrying him far into the depths of the divine self-existence, and leading on to the future of a great covenant history, in which

God would shine out in His covenant acts, the light, the strength, the searching fire, the sustaining hope of His people's hearts. Is it wonderful that inspirations should come from such a source; that, first Moses, and then the whole nation, should be lifted up to a sense so unparalleled of His existence and presence?

Of the passage from verse 16 to the close of the chapter, we shall not treat, as the points contained in it come up later on. It may seem to some, contrary to probability, that the first call should be so specific and enter so much into detail; but that is quite according to the divine rule. Every called man is a servant, and he must be made to feel from the beginning that he is carrying out the positive behests of another will than his own. In the call of Isaiah, of Jeremiah, of Paul, to name no more, we have forecasts of the entire course of their subsequent service.

Hitherto we have been seeing the divine side of this call—the certainty of God's presence with His own, the sublimity of His unveiling of Himself. And if we lingered on that lofty plane, we might think that in its essence this was some superhuman transaction, far above ordinary experience. It is, however, only a typical case of that surrender to service, which God desires from His own. And so let us turn to the human questionings, and even shrinkings, which accompanied this act. Three steps yet remain before Moses is shut up to God's will.

Many people cannot get above the heathen idea that communion with God, and especially that every visitation of the human spirit by God, must kindle a divine frenzy. Contrariwise, such incursions of divine thought leave the mind exceptionally calm and clear.

The very glory of God which had just burst on Moses made him all the more desirous that the work should not fail. Might he not find the children of Israel so unreceptive, that even what now flooded and fired his soul would not stir theirs? As he recalls what they were forty years ago, this fear grows to a certainty, 'They will not believe me or hearken to my voice.'

It was a perfectly just thought. The light of the sun is as darkness, till it find an atmosphere through which to flame into visibility. Even this glorious name would be an idle word to those who had no faith. It may be that Moses over-estimated the crass unreceptiveness of the people. Still this was a difficulty to be faced. A simpler faith might have stood upon God's 'Certainly I will be with thee,' and asked no questions about ways and means. But God deals with each servant as He finds him; and since this thought is a stumblingblock to Moses' faith, He removes it. He would have his service to be not a dread, but a liberty and joy, with which the servant's whole heart could go. Yes, those who have taken up God's yoke learn to trust Him. Do not fear to bring your questionings to Him.

God gave him three signs. As to the place of miracle in bearing witness to spiritual truth, a single sentence must suffice. Believing in the great miracles of the Incarnation and Resurrection we can have no reasonable ground for objecting to these Old Testament signs of God's covenant activity. This, however, may be said, if you admit miracle at all, there could not be a greater necessity than in the case of a people, living for four centuries in a heathen land, without one external indication in all that period of God's presence, and crushed by oppression to the

brink of despair. We would rather point out the appositeness of these signs. Like the miracles of our Lord, they are acted parables, though not so profound as these. Moses is holding in his hand the shepherd's staff. God bade him cast it on the ground. The familiar rod with which he had ordered his flock and sustained his footsteps, suddenly became a hissing, wriggling serpent. Moses fled. Instead of pastoral calm, he shall soon have to confront the erected, serpent-like hate of Egypt, terrifying to the strongest heart. But at God's call he puts forth his hand, and the venomous beast becomes a staff once more. He shall master that hate of Egypt, and bend it to his end.

But if this should fail—though surely such a sign should carry a lesson of power to every heart—two others are given. The second, striking in itself, was a picture to Moses of what he must pass through. Putting his hand into his bosom at God's command, when he took it forth it had become leprous as snow. He was going down, at God's command, into a mass of leprous corruption, not only in the vile heathenism with which he would have to contend, but in the impurities and faithlessness of his own people. And he must go right into the heart of that corruption, and breast it in God's name. But need he fear to be tainted and borne down by that seething mass? Let him put his hand into his bosom again; and, lo! what was dead leprosy is living flesh. God can keep him, and not only preserve him from death, but make the dead live through his means. The last miracle—turning the water of the Nile into blood—shows God's power to strike with death the core of Egypt's life, should that nation stand in the way.

Verily God sends no one a warfare at his own charges. All power is to be of Him, and new revelations of comfort and strength attend our every onward step. Surely Moses' difficulties are cleared away, and he is now ready for all God's perfect will? No, we have to discern in a great soul a singular misjudgment of himself. After all, he was only human, and nowhere is he more earnest than where he is most mistaken. The thought of that magnificent message is in his mind, and his feeling is, 'Who am I, to utter this forth to my fellow-men.' His solicitude is for God's cause; and he says what he fully believes: 'I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant.' He is forgetting the palmy days of Egypt, when he was mighty in words and deeds. In these last years of deep-sea sounding and profound meditation,—with his heart all stirred and his thoughts in a tumult,—he had lost, as many men have lost, that easy, fluent utterance, characteristic of former times; and, under the burden of these last unveilings, he feels as if the task of reasoned, orderly speech were more difficult than ever. A man must come into a certain measure of calm, and concentration of faculty, and command of himself and subject, in order to express himself well. But if he knew it, these upheavals were in order that he might yet speak from a deeper depth, and with a pregnancy and power all his own.

Leaving him to find out that, God addresses Himself to the lack in his faith. Moses does not yet see that everything must be of God. He is concerned about the intrinsic force or lack of force in his own eloquence, instead of seeing that everything must be through divine power alone. How wonderfully God reduces him to recognise his own nothingness. 'Who

hath made man's mouth?' Who gave man the very organ of speech? Who appointed some to be dumb, incapable of speech, just as sovereignly He appoints others deaf, incapable of hearing, blind, incapable of seeing, and still others with that latter power? Faculty and the negation of faculty are absolutely of Him. 'Go then,' He saith, 'show thy trust by absolute obedience, and I will be with thy mouth,' nothing can be wrong with thy utterance then—and, more, I shall teach thee what thou shalt say.

Is he not overcome by a love that goes beyond his sense of need? It is marvellous to think of a man like Moses, so self-disciplined and great-souled, not being overcome. If it had been any of us, whose souls cleave unto the dust, such guilty wavering would not have been so strange. But we are in a sense thankful to find this strain of human frailty in so great a man. Moses sank into this pitiful self-mistrust. He so shrank from the load of responsibility that he would fain cast it from him. He prays to be left in obscurity. 'O Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send.' Let us not blame him amiss. It was the very acuteness of his perception of all that this mission demanded which agonised his soul. He did not contest God's right to send him. But he presumed to say that God might do far better than send himself. And here he sinned. God was angry with him. Had He not the right to choose whom He would? And after all that had passed, was not this petulant self-withdrawal contempt of the wisdom of God?

What if, after all, however—for God knows our frame—it was the impatience of a physical nature, overtaxed with the intense experiences of that time?

Without arguing or disabusing his mind, God, who knows so well how to hearten us, gives him a crutch for his weariness, and sends into the wearied man's heart a breath of home. 'Aaron can speak. Behold, he is on his way to thee.' Aaron! And so Jehovah knows all about him and his family whom he has not seen for forty years. His heart is melted with tenderness and love. O Moses, how could you resist or mistrust such a God? And last of all, He draws His chosen one close to His heart. Aaron shall be thy mouth to the people, but thou shalt be My mouth to him, living with Me, and being unto him instead of God! Look! Moses does not stay another moment. He returned to his herd. But not even does he abide there. Leaving them in faithful keeping, he goes back to Jethro, with the request, 'Let me go.' He has won time's best gifts, a resolved heart and a surrendered will. He is ready for the service of God.

VI

THE RETURN TO EGYPT AND ITS IMMEDIATE RESULT

EXODUS iv. 18-31

CALLED of God, in the sublime manner which we have already witnessed, Moses is now on his way to the fulfilment of that call. Every step in the life of such a man is of immense significance for all truly religious men. And so we present you with some pictures of successive scenes in his return to Egypt, and in his earliest interviews with God's oppressed people.

And thus we are brought back to Midian, somewhere at the south of the Sinaitic peninsula, on its eastern, or (as some think) its western, side. Moses has returned with all haste from the scene of his call, bent on the immediate fulfilment of God's behests. He cannot flee as he did from Egypt, breaking right away from the entanglements of the past. We can only go forward to the service of Him, who is a God of righteousness, in the way of righteously fulfilling all the immediate and personal obligations in which we are involved. And so Moses takes a double journey, first south to the sea-coast, and then north again to the mount of God, to satisfy the just claims of Jethro. This moral sensibility of Moses

has important lessons for us all.² Many people, when they have some little bit of work to do for God, which they think great, and which from their standpoint may be in a sense great, are apt to imagine that they can claim exemption from ordinary obligations. They neglect common courtesies of life, disregard family duty, and sometimes exact a homage from their fellows, and exhibit a high-handed arbitrariness of action which they would be the very last to allow in others. And, indeed, the multitude are often ready to concede such liberties as signs, or at least frequent accompaniments of greatness. They are really signs of the small egotisms that often cling to men of rare endowments, charged with extensive enterprises. The truly great man is he who, as in the present case, with the unparalleled burden of a nation's deliverance to work out, stoops with a humble heart and in childlike unconsciousness to the lowliest task of right.

And yet Jethro was far from being sympathetic. A believer, he limited himself to the simple traditional belief that lingered on from the world's morning. Evidently he was not very receptive to the new thoughts and purposes which, labouring in Moses' heart, would sometimes leap to his tongue. Evidently the man of God felt that there was no use in his telling Jethro anything of what he had just seen. And so he simply says, 'Let me go, I pray thee, and return unto my brethren which are in Egypt, and see whether they be yet alive.' The Church is full of men like Jethro,—their father's sons—held by chains of reverence to a great past, loyal to traditional conceptions of truth and duty, but deprecating—in a very passion for the quiet routine

of former times—any further outshining of the purpose of God, which summons them to a closer walk and a loftier consecration. To save controversy, Moses had to keep the burning glory of this great new name, bolted and barred within his heart, and only say, 'I would go see my brethren.'

But one thing Moses could not hide—the transfiguration of his whole life, the concentration of his great energies through this call. So profoundly impressed is Jethro with what he sees, that he instantly yields. 'Go in peace.' And now when the tie which bound him to Midian is broken, the man of God seems to linger a brief space, before actually commencing his journey. At least, some have thought so, seeing that another word from God was borne in upon his mind ere he set out. That, however, may be a very prosaic way of interpreting a spiritual fact. The season in which a man fully yields himself to the Divine Will, is always a time of frequent and loving visitation on God's part. Like a mother bird fluttering over her young to shield and guide, God breaks in upon the heart in frequent flashes of insight, anticipating every possible attack of doubt with a new inspiration of faith.

Thus, as he is setting about his preparations, there comes the great heartening word, containing nothing mayhap which he did not know, or at any rate guess before, but putting it in fresh light and with vivid personal point. 'Go! all the men are dead which sought thy life.' May God be praised for the heartening thoughts, for unexpected reflections so full of comfort which He often throws in on our lives lifting us to immovable confidence from the yawning gulf of fear. Swiftly would resolution come on the

heels of such a word. And now, see the Hebrew herdsman on his way. Verily the kingdom of God cometh not with observation. A humbler company never crossed that great desert. We read nothing of possession in cattle or grain. If he owned these, which is unlikely, he left them in Jethro's hands. It would almost seem as if his belongings could be conveyed on a solitary ass, himself trudging by the side, with the rod of God in his hands. If so, what analogy does this scene present to that other, of Joseph and Mary, with the infant Christ, travelling southward from Bethlehem to Egypt, in the same fashion as this little company travels north from Midian?

But if the poverty of Moses was so extreme as to be likely to provoke crushing questions, a loving God keeps his mind full of inspiring thoughts. He reminds him anew of the conditions of his great embassy: "See that thou do all these wonders which I have put in thine hand. Do not be carried off from leaning solely on what I am to do in thee. Thine impotence will hinder as little as thy might can help. Everything must be in My power. Nor think thou art going to have an easy triumph. There will be delay. Pharaoh will interpose his whole might against the fulfilment of My will. Yea, I have a purpose to serve in such interpositions. Since he will oppose, I shall deliver him up to the full sweep of his rebellious instincts, so that he may accomplish My purpose by his opposition. I will harden his heart that he shall not let the people go. Yea, hence will arise thy work and office. I shall put thee in the breach between Pharaoh and Me. Thou shalt speak to him in My Name."

Where is Moses as these thoughts go bounding through his mind? Midian is behind, the wild free desert is round him, he is entering into the mountain tract stretching far before him, northward to Sinai. Nimbly the harmless necessary ass is ambling over the flint-strewn sand. Relieving the animal, his first-born son, we may suppose, walks by his side. What between without and within, his soul is absorbed and stirred in strange degree. Now he tightens the girth, or gives the ass a handful of dry grass, or turns to say a bright word to his son by his side. Anon, the great current of inward thought resumes its sway. The might of Pharaoh shall be marshalled against God. And thou shalt say, 'Thus saith Jehovah.' And now, by a most natural course of suggestion, another new thought dawns on Moses' mind. The objection would come, 'Why speak to Merenptah, (or Meneptah, as the Pharaoh of that time was called), who had his own gods, in the name of the Hebrews' God?' But with that, springing out of all he had before learned, would come the faith. Yes, but this is the Universal God. All nations are His sons. Israel is the first-born son, in whom, according to promise, all nations are to be blessed. Hence their unique place, and God's special interest in them. And then, having risen to this height, Moses is borne by the spirit of prophecy right on to the goal of his long struggle; and this as a word of God to Pharaoh, as the goal and sum of the long conflict, gets fixed in his mind. 'Let go my first-born, or I will slay thy first-born.'

Each man is an individual, and there enters into God's dealings with each, corresponding to his individual destiny, something special and distinct.

Particularly is this the case with a chosen vessel like Moses. Still the common facts of God's dealing with His children, of which true believers have experience, authenticate such incidents in this man of God's career. How many, reading these words, can look back on leadings of God, distinct and positive calls to service, irresistible impressions of duty, marked orderings of Divine Providence, by which they have been guided, against the current of their own inclinations, in the path which God has marked out for them. Nor have they been without the visitation of helpful thought, tokens of the divine presence, gracious encouragements in Providence, which, despite all obstacles, have borne them through. God's presence with His people to-day, is ample vindication of what we read in Scripture, regarding His presence with former generations of His own. As soon might an unmusical man write a treatise on what is most distinctive in the qualities of music, as a soul, in whom the spiritual is dormant through estrangement from God, understand the characteristic qualities and conditions of the spiritual life. The believer next door, is to him as great an enigma, as Moses three thousand years ago.

Onward he goes, and at nightfall comes, not to an inn in our sense of the term, nor even to a caravanserai such as is common in the East, but to some level sheltered place, provided with pasture and water, where travellers in their journeys generally camped for the night. Here a strange thing happened. Suddenly Moses turned very ill. It seemed as if he would die. For a while he looked for nothing but that he should perish. In those days men did not inquire so closely into the natural causes

of things. Had he done so, he might have found a sufficient reason for his sickness in the intense strain of recent days. What occupied Moses' mind was a question, which in similar circumstances ought to occupy ours, even when we know, ever so much better than he did, the natural occasions of disease. God must be regarded as absolutely supreme, when He is thought of as working through a system of law, even as when, in simpler days, men conceived Him administering the universe by individual fiats of His will.

The thought, then, which came into Moses' mind was, 'What can be the meaning of God in this?' Here am I, His servant, called to a specific task, actually on the road to fulfil that task. His purpose cannot have changed; and He would not work to the defeat of His own plan. The reason, then, he would conclude, must be in himself. Looking back over the past, he recalls that in the hurry of removal, and under pressure of his great commission, he had forgotten to circumcise his younger son. Let no man step rudely in his carnal self-confidence into this holy place and say, 'Pshaw! what a small thing for which to arrest the progress of Moses, and involve him in such fearful peril!' If the objector have nothing in his own history to light up such an experience, let him turn to the histories of those spiritual athletes who have lived in God, and done valiantly for Him. What do you find in the very centre of their most exalted seasons of communion but trials, obstacles, difficulties, which seemed passing strange at the time, but which at length vindicated their necessity, by creating in those men an awful sense of God's sovereignty, and of that prostrate, utter submission, in

which all service must be done. Neither Moses nor his family had any place before God, except through that covenant, which God had set up with Abraham. His works gave him no standing, nor his prospective service rights. His child, like himself, must come, through the gate of circumcision, into the sphere of covenant mercy.

Often when we are coming nearest God, in whole-souled submission even as to little things, we find ourselves breaking away from those who refuse to follow so far. Zipporah was like Jethro. All her sympathies were with the tame traditional ways, and quiet formal beliefs of her home. Nor had she a great nature, that could be caught up into passionate sympathy with her husband's thoughts and aims. She lived in her own little circle of domestic ideas and duties, true and kind enough according to her lights, but incapable of understanding him, and finding her happiness, exclusively in motherly cares and joys. She had left home reluctantly. Every step was taking her from the little world of her small interests. And all that Moses could tell her, of wonderful things to come, did not countervail by a single straw. They were outside the circuit of her poor thoughts. Thus has she been brooding all the livelong day. And when at night, in that solitary place, Moses fell ill, her regrets would increase. What a wife could do in the matter of simple remedies, she would attempt; but all the time with the thought in her heart, 'If he had only taken my advice.' Then, in broken accents from the pain-wrung frame, would come Moses' resolve at once to perform a neglected duty—by circumcising the child. Trouble upon trouble seems breaking on that disconsolate, querulous spirit.

Her womanly heart shrank from cutting off, with rude stone knife, the foreskin of her babe. The constraint of God, however, is upon Moses, and he will brook no refusal. Zipporah, protesting in her heart, obeys; and then all the regrets and irritation of the past day finding vent in a full flood, she cast the bleeding fragment at his feet, with the angry petulant words, 'Surely a bloody husband thou art to me.'

Soon after, when the sudden prostrating attack had passed, her mood changed. Rejoicing in her husband's recovery, she began to fawn on him. Taking up the angry words of the previous day, she cleverly put a new meaning into them. 'You are my husband brought back to me from the dead by a blood covenant—mine twice over now.' She was a good woman, with light enough to catch God's meaning at long last, with grace enough to repent. This incident, however, has brought out the palpable fact, that she was unfitted to stand the strains of Moses' career. And so, by a sort of mutual consent, she goes back to her home, leaving Moses, not more alone, for in his deeper life she had no part, but without the hindrance of her caprices and emotional storms. Poor woman, what an unparalleled chance she lost! If she had had the self-obliterating affection, the courage, the devotion, to trust Moses wholly, and to support him with her sympathy, and daring, and clever woman's wit, she would have risen to a spiritual primacy among the women of the world,—till she came, the consummate flower of womanhood, who was counted, and proved herself worthy to be the mother of our Lord.

Poor Zipporah, gladly returning,—or if with a certain sorrow, with an undeniable sense of relief,—from an untried journey, which she had not faith to

accept as from God, is a picture for all time. She has proved her incapacity for what is now, as it was then, woman's completest and her happiest career. We thank God for the public activities of consecrated women. We would be among the foremost to concede them ample place, for social service and public privileges and rights. We believe that, from time to time, individuals among them are called to a single life, being set apart to work inconsistent with family responsibilities and claims, just as there are men under the conviction that in a solitary life alone, can they accomplish the work which God has given them to do. But so far as all human experience extends, woman rises to her most exalted influence, and reveals her finest characteristics, when, by a supreme affection, the note of sacrifice pervades her life, and she lives in husband and children, and for their sake.

Manifestly, the life in God has its wrenches,—Moses would not see wife or sons till he returned victorious into this region,—yet it has compensations. God knoweth our frame. He knows that the most exalted human lives are rooted in blood ties ; and that association with our kindred stirs emotions which nought else can. As Moses goes toiling on his lonely way, he comes farther into the long defiles of the Sinaitic range. At last, with beating heart, he sees not far away the riven brows of that peak at whose base he had met with God. What a rush of overwhelming memories comes into his mind, as he fancies that he discerns the thorn-bush, which had flamed with the Divine presence !

But soon there is that which sends even these thoughts to flight. The valley is not untenanted as in former times. A man draws near. How he came,

whether on camel or ass, whether alone or accompanied, we are not told. The human interest crushes out every other thought. This is one of the great dramatic meetings of history. Around are the solemn peaks, aflame it may be with the fiery pink of the dying day. The two approach, and still approach, across the silent spaces of the desert, the eye of each bent on the other. At last—cold and restrained, as to a stranger—each accosts the other, till by word or glance their relationship is revealed. Can you not see them locked in each other's arms? Can you not hear the sob of ecstatic joy, as Moses knows himself held in his brother Aaron's embrace? For wellnigh forty years, he has not met a solitary soul from the old home. What questions would pass about their mother, about their father if he were still alive, about that brave sister, whose cleverness had won for his infantile weakness a mother's love and care! How the old Egyptian life, that had fallen so far into the background, would rise up again! And Aaron tells him of the growing oppression of his brethren, working in details which would rouse his wrath,—of the death of Rameses and of the accession of a new king—till, in the eloquent words, a picture of the condition of the Israelites gleams before his mind. Can you not realise the scene?—that eager speaker, this intense listener, while the mountain shadows deepen across the valleys; and then suddenly they are in the dark, beneath the brilliant, throbbing stars.

Of all this, however, the record tells nothing, confining itself to what Moses told Aaron. There, in the very region where the marvellous event occurred, he went over all the words of the Lord who had sent him, and the signs which God had given to support

his faith. Slowly, and with laboured utterance, Moses would make known these sublime experiences, till at last, in all its magnificence of meaning, God's great name would stand forth. Then flaming out in more rapid speech, he would paint in their fresh wonder those startling signs,—God's love and grace to him,—and his own stubborn resistance. With beating heart, Aaron finds himself involved in this call, and understands now the meaning of the constraint, which brought him thus far to meet his brother.

In that hour, amid the fervour of a common devotion to God's great cause, was cemented a friendship—a brotherhood—which, amid sunshine and storm, and under the tremendous strains of their agitated careers, continued with scarcely a break, till Aaron was laid to rest in lone Mount Hor, near the promised land. Inspired by a common enthusiasm, they hasten back to their kindred in Egypt. After weary desert journeyings, crossing somewhere above Suez, they would find themselves in the land of Pharaoh. Mer-enptah, the reigning monarch, as his predecessors had frequently done, had transferred his court to Zoan or Tanis on the borders of Lake Menzaleh, on the north-east of the Delta. This once famous capital is now represented by the fishing village of San; and among the wrecks of former greatness strewn the soil, there is an inscription of this king. In Psalm 78th we are told that 'marvellous things were wrought in the field of Zoan,' and we have no doubt that this little-known site was the scene of the plagues.

The desire of Moses, however, would be to meet with his people, where they would be least under the inspection of the king. And so he would probably go back to the region to the north of Memphis, where he

was known. After the exhaustion of the preceding reign, and under the rule of a weaker monarch, while the tyranny is insupportable, the supervision may not have been so complete. At least Moses finds no difficulty in summoning the elders, and through them a large gathering of the people.

It would be an interesting scene. Crushed to the earth though they were, these Israelites, with all the sad consequences of their captivity afterward to be revealed, were neither pagans nor slaves. One likes to see that rudiment of organisation in the elders. Is there not a feeling there after national unity, the thirst for organisation and representation? We, who have never had burned into our souls the despairing anguish of remediless bondage, cannot know what these men felt, as from their mud huts, along the fields of barley and wheat, on the footpaths of black soil, they hastened to this gathering. They would know of this race-brother, who, after having been raised to such a dazzling height of fortune, had for his people forfeited all. His re-emergence, after a disappearance for forty years, would be very startling. To the older he would be but a vague memory, to the younger a half legendary hero. If doubt arose in any mind, his association with Aaron, who had but recently gone from them, would confirm their faith.

We have said they were not pagans. Memories of the great past had never wholly faded from their minds. To the last, they would keep up their separateness from the heathenism of their oppressors. Unsustained by institutions, however, and unquickened by public opportunities for communion with God, life, and even reverence, would flag and fail. How far the material had submerged the spiritual, it would be

difficult to realise. Beyond question, however, they would be profoundly stirred, as they looked on this man who had stood on the steps of the Egyptian throne, and who had sacrificed his career for their sakes. No trappings of the court are about him, nor signs of royal state. There he stands, bronzed with the suns of the desert, touched with the frosts of eighty years, moulded into a God-like majesty, yet by every sign a toiler like themselves. He leaves Aaron to speak, the while his very appearance is preaching, with subduing force, to every Jewish heart.

They are carried back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They hear that their God has spoken to this Moses. They receive God's words of loving interest in them. Tears start into some eyes as they listen to His declared purpose to deliver them. What is this that is stirring in sere and despairing hearts? The dry bones are living. Founts of hope and holy longing are rising in many a soul. We have sometimes thought that we would like to have seen the Kingswood colliers weeping, under Wesley's preaching, till the tears made white lanes down their black cheeks. We feel now, as if across an immeasurably wider gulf, we would like to have seen these begrimed bondsmen, waking to realise that they were the chosen people of God, called to a loftier destiny, elected to a divine fellowship, unique as it was sublime.

They did not wait for the signs, but believed Aaron's word. Not but that the signs added vividness and urgency to the word. Still, what touched them was the word, and in that word the fact that Jehovah had considered their case, and had pity on their miseries. The present pitying love of their

covenant God, melted their hearts. By a common impulse they passed from discourse to prayer. They bowed their heads, and lifted up their hearts to heaven.

Ah, Moses thought that he must have his artillery of signs, to break down Israel's unbelief; as the modern preacher thinks he must have his siege-material of apologetics, in order to subdue unbelieving men. But what the human heart was made for, and what it needs, is God; and behind a hundred fences of unbelief or indifference, men are best pierced with the authentic tidings that God has been thinking about them, that He has a purpose of love toward them, and that He is now willing to bless them. Let us have faith, far more faith than we possess, in our message to men. In the toilsome bondage of the world, there are lives as dreary, hearts as disconsolate, as any of past time. 'To you, O men, I call! God has been looking on you. He has been providing for your case, suiting Himself to your need.' 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

VII

THE FIRST INTERVIEW WITH PHARAOH

EXODUS v. 1—vi. 9

THE breath of God has stirred the sere branches of captive Israel. Like springs in the desert, covenant hopes leap up within their hearts. The winter is past—the time of the singing of birds is come. Supported by a new national desire, Moses and Aaron feel emboldened to go in unto Pharaoh. But what shall they say? To tell him of God's promise to their fathers many centuries ago, or of His purpose stretching out into the far future, would be utterly vain. They would but provoke his scorn. And so in Moses' actual message to Pharaoh the essential points, in so far as they affected the Egyptian king, are alone dwelt upon. Pharaoh was treating those Hebrews, whose fathers had come into Egypt in the capacity of honoured guests, as his absolute possession, having none of the rights of men. God interposes His authority between Pharaoh and them. 'My people,' He calls them. He insists, because of the authority which He has over them, that they shall render Him that service of worship which is His due. And He asks Pharaoh to recognise His right by letting Israel go.

This little circumstance, like everything we come

across, shows us that in this entire narrative we are up among the mountain springs of the moral life of humanity. Here we have the first typical assertion of that spiritual independence which is the birthright of every man, as the subject and servant of God. Since He has had a people upon earth, God has come into all earthly sovereignties, and has said: 'Whatever your authority over this people, that cannot prejudice Mine. These people are My people. Their highest duty and privilege are My worship and service. And you must concede full liberty for the performance of that loftier obligation. Spiritual independence is not something which a king may concede, in larger or lesser measure, as he may see fit. It is a right which he must recognise. It is not a gift from the fountain of his authority. It is something which owes its existence to another—a Divine authority—which limits his. "Thus saith Jehovah, Let My people go."'

One is struck with the sobriety and moderation of the divine demand. The question of Israel's departure is not yet raised, but only of their having full liberty to worship their God. And as such, it was fitted to prove a searching test to Pharaoh. Had there been any deep reverence for the Unseen in his heart, there could not but have been some recognition of the beauty and fitness of such reverence in the Hebrews. As we know only too well, however, the symbolic system of nature-worship in Egypt had no power to control conscience, or to lift men out of themselves in true surrender. A pure self-idolatrous egoism dominated these kings, who took the gods under their protection, and honoured them but to augment their own praise. Constraint of conscience,

moral obligation, religious reverence in the spiritual sense, were hid from their eyes. Rameses stood for the god Amon, Merenptah, it may be, for Ptah, and so in true pagan devotion to their gods, they resented the claim of Jehovah.

In this great controversy, then, we have the pagan spirit, as we see it incarnated in so many Egyptian temple inscriptions, warring with the lofty spirit of pure religion. 'Who is the Lord, that I should hearken unto Him? I know Him not, nor will I let Israel go.' The answer of Moses and Aaron is pregnant with meaning: 'We do not raise the question of your relation to Jehovah. We ask you to consider ours. He is our God. And of late He has appeared to us with wonderful vividness and power. We are under a religious constraint to own and honour Him by sacrifice. We cannot but fear what may be the consequences of a further disregard of Him and His worship. "Let us go even three days into the wilderness to sacrifice unto Him."'

Here we have the supplementary truth to that which was enunciated in the former divine word. There we saw that God has a sphere of authority over men, which kings must recognise. Here we see that there is communion between man and God, and that thence there arise constraints of conscience and religious reverence, which earthly authority must respect. Now, in these words we have the fundamental principle of religious liberty. And they are rooted in the primal foundations of God's self-revelation to men. So long as that revelation is in abeyance, they are unrecognised. The moment God flames into visibility, and is laid hold on by a true faith, they live. They stand out as clear in the hour

of God's outshining to captive Israel in Egypt, as in Scotland during the conflicts of Melville and Henderson. They are immediately involved, in communion with, and surrender to the living God. The charter of our religious freedom is not in any system of polity, but in God, whose spirit within us can alone kindle and maintain its inextinguishable flame.

There have been times, when pleas and contentions for religious freedom, have stirred this land from end to end. These having been secured, we are being agitated by questions of civil and social liberty. A man's right to a full share in the fruits of his own labour, a living wage, the eight hours day, state or municipal works for the unemployed,—these and such like are the matters occupying attention in our time. Would you be much astonished, if we said, that in matters of civil right, as much as in matters of religious right, the charter of our liberties is in God?

Force settles nothing. When Pharaoh said, 'I know not Jehovah, and will not let Israel go'; and when again, in answer to the plea of conscience, he smote the earth with the hoof of power, saying, 'Get to your burdens, let heavier work be laid on the men, and let them not regard lying words. Go, get yourselves straw, and none of your work shall be diminished,' he was trying to solve a question of right with the mace of power. And though that brute force was imperial, so constituted is this universe, that it is compelled to bow before the right championed by a herd of slaves. Force settles nothing. And this is as true when the force is in the hands of an enormous multitude, paralysing industry in a strike, as when it is lodged in a monarch playing his dynastic schemes, with a million men, on the chessboard of war. There

may be a plea for force at times, as being necessary to arouse attention to wrong, though even within that limited sphere, the incidental evils are so great, as to justify it only as a last resource. But worth or use beyond, force has absolutely none.

What curbs injustice and accentuates right, is the living consciousness of God in employer and employed. The man who knows that he is a son of God, in living communion with the Most High, cannot sink to be a slave. His dignity as a man, the supreme worth of moral wellbeing, will compel, wherever the law of God prevails, such a standard of decent living as is consistent with a chaste and morally elevating home life ; such periods of work as admit of a certain measure of self-culture and interest in public concerns ; such security of employment, as imparts stability and a certain sobriety of tone to life.

On the other hand, in the employer, this living consciousness of God, keeps in check temptation to unmeasured desire for wealth, awakens just conceptions of obligation, to those by whom his work is done and his wealth secured, and creates an interest in their physical, intellectual, and moral welfare. This common sense of obligation to a common Divine governor creates also a common ground, on which master and men can meet, for arbitrating on all matters of remuneration and work. The men can appeal to a Divine standard of right as against the employers, and the employers against the men, and they will come to a common understanding, where both are at their best, in submission to a Right that is above us all.

Here we are in contact with the real. We have but to secure that religion, be a mightier force in our-

selves, and in other men, to gain a ground where, demonstrably, social injustice would be unknown. Whereas, when we take up with the speculative reconstructions of society, that are issuing innumerable as frog spawn of the Nile, we are in a vague unknown,—floated out into a scene so changed, that even if it were realisable, we could have no security, but that evils, immensely worse than those from which we suffer, would accrue.

In religion, then, is the one guarantee of civil, as of religious right. We cannot have social welfare, apart from personal and individual goodness. What strikes us in some builders of new social theories is the light and airy way in which they suppose, that when individual property and competitive interests are at an end, and all share in a common fund, evil will be eliminated, and we shall attain to millennial peace. But you cannot thus exorcise the evil passions of the human heart. Selfishness, and the love of pre-eminence, and envy, and indolence, and craft, and dishonesty, will still exist, vitiating the finest schemes, breaking the balance of the most perfect social plans. These theorists do not know the human heart, and certainly they do not know human history. Not a step upward has been taken to larger rights and truer liberty save with infinite struggle and sacrifice. And in all the noblest conflicts, the force which has broken the power of rampant selfishness and wrong has been, not material interest alone, but first and chief, an overmastering conviction of obligation to God. And that conviction alone has staying power, neither transported into excess, nor turned from its point, able to hold on without despair, to believe without sight, hating anarchy as sincerely as it loves

liberty, and seeking, not advantages for a single class, but equal rights for all.

The reader will pardon us if we have been carried somewhat far, in our illustrations, from the present hour, of that old situation. For in this narrative we have got the first conflict on a great scale, in the history of humanity, between force and right. And it was terrible. Think of the new hope that had stirred in the hearts of these captive Israelites, of their faith in Moses and Aaron, of the vastly widened horizon of possibility, through the inflashing of God's heartening words ;—and then of the hush of expectation which held them as their representatives went in to the king. Oh, it is an inspiring thing for a man, and much more for a people, to lean on God for some great deliverance ! But what is this ? Moses and Aaron are hustled like common men from the royal presence. The king will have none of Jehovah. He refuses to recognise even the most primitive human rights. Yea, he strains his power to crush them with the multiplied labours of the field. Then, as to-day, the bricks of Egypt were sun-dried, the best being mixed with chopped straw to make them hold together the better. Hitherto the straw had been supplied, but now, without diminishing their output, they must find straw for themselves. They toil to the utmost of their strength ; but when the officers of their own number brought to the Egyptian taskmasters the necessarily lessened tale of work, they were beaten. Once and again they made the attempt to conform to the tyrannical edict with like result. The thing could not be done. The Egyptians have no answer but the lash. At last, rankling with a sense of injustice, the Hebrew officers go in a body to Pharaoh

only to find the master more implacable than the minions.

One thing is to be rejoiced in. They do not lose faith in God. When we remember how high had been their hopes, we could not be astonished if this terrible disappointment should have cast them into despair. But, as many of us have found, when once God is received into the heart by faith, He is not easily dislodged. Trust in Him keeps firm hold when every earthly hope would give way. He so vindicates His reality in every seat of our being, and intertwines His influences with our sympathies and affections, that even when doubts and difficulties overwhelm the conscious spirit, it does not wholly yield. These officers turn upon God's servants, and put all the blame on them: 'Jehovah look upon you and judge. You have done this by your foolish meddling, or by your unwise way of going to work. So far from helping, you have only made us an offence; so far from achieving deliverance, you have secured our utter destruction.'

These were cutting words, and very unjust to boot. Moses must have let them know that Pharaoh would not willingly let them go. But it is so easy when anything annoys, much more when, as in the present case, there is real trouble, to put the blame on others. Ministers of religion have had far more than their own share of that from Moses' day till now. And only those who suffer, know how it cuts. This reproach was peculiarly lacerating to the lawgiver. For one of the rankling memories of his life was of a blunder—an act of foolish management in God's service, when he rashly smote the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. You have your sore point, your

rankling memory of past failure, and when criticism comes sharply down on that, how you wince! Moses, however, does not lose heart, nor flee, as he did forty years before. His work is on a different footing now. He is walking by faith, and so, as in everything, he is guided by God, he carries all his case to Him. How plainly he speaks to Jehovah! 'Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he has evil-entreated this people, neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all.' God wants us to put Him to the proof, to hold Him to His plighted word.

But what answer does He give? A full and royal one. In one sense it is gathered up into that single word 'now.' Now—it could not be before. Pharaoh had to get a fair chance. He had to be met with,—appeal had to be made to him on the ground of right. Only when he resisted that plea, and stood tyrannically on the ground of superior force, and stretched his force to the extreme of injustice and inhumanity, could force be fairly used to compel him to do right. 'Now,' says Jehovah, who deals with all on grounds of right, 'thou wilt see what I do to Pharaoh. By a strong hand laid upon him, he *shall* let them go, ay, be glad to drive them out of his land.'

How foolish are our judgments and criticisms! The officers said to Moses and Aaron, 'This is all of you, God judge you.' Poor Moses came to God, agonized by the thought that failure somehow might be owing to him. Whereas God was carrying out a part of His purpose that had immediate reference to neither, but to another, Pharaoh, with whom henceforth He was to deal. What a simmer of judgments about the failures of churches and Christians, bubbles up in common speech, and boils over into

our public journals—especially what vehement bandying of blame. Let us learn that we are dealing with a Mind infinitely greater than our own, moving on to elements in His purpose which we cannot foresee. Our judgments are often most inept, when we regard them as most self-evident and shrewd.

But let us turn to the facts. Every modern nation has got its social troubles, but the troubles of civilisation dwindle into nothing beside this bondage. A whole people are, in strictest truth, crushed to the limit of physical endurance. And what do they receive from God to rally and sustain their sinking spirits in the crisis of their agony? A fresh promise. Faith, when at the point of fainting, is challenged into fresh exercise. We think we hear the hoarse laugh of some modern reformers at this word. Ay, but there is a tremendous difference between a man who believes in God, and a man who does not believe. A man who does not believe, has only the narrow forecast of his own poor judgment to go on. And when he can by himself see no way out of his misery, he waxes desperate and throws bombs. A believer, however, even in the deepest dark, has faith in a fundamental right. He knows that the universe is bottomed on right, that the mightiest wrong must bow before the right, and so, though it were but in a half despair, he stays himself on God. And more because of that fundamental faith, the seasons of waiting under trial have been for nations, again and again, the travail hours into a loftier life.

Deeply conceived, every hour of agony, every stroke of the lash, was required for what was to come. To dislodge a whole nation from its dwelling-place, to send it forth in faith on God's bare word, to

sustain it amid difficulty and trial, was no easy task. It has never been done again in all the history of the world. And if, on the one hand, after events kindled faith into enthusiasm, the excessive tyranny of Pharaoh on the other, had the effect of breaking every lingering tie of attachment, and making the impatience of bondage more intense.

But more wonderful still, to the material mind of this generation, God presents to that suffering people, as a remedy for every trouble, the new thought of Himself. Alas, in this we can see, how far our world has wandered from God. There is nothing which this world wants less to-day than God, or any thought about Him. Nevertheless—and it is an exceeding privilege to have the opportunity of saying it, right in the face of this world's wisdom—in God and in true thoughts about Him, are the only deliverance for this God-disowning time.

‘Why, My people,’ it is as if God said, ‘all is not dark. In one respect you have singular advantage. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not get further than a definite conception of My almightiness. And they built on that for the fulfilment of My promise. But you have been carried up into a vision of My self-existence. You have seen the ground of My action, in heart-love and sympathy with you. You have realised My unchanging faithfulness in holding, through century after century, to My covenant. You have received the renewal of My promise, as something glorious and near. In all these acts you see and know Myself, as I have never till now been revealed. Is that nothing?—that I, revealed in My characteristic qualities of love, faithfulness; goodness, am standing up in My Divine uncreated Infinite

Being for you. Granted that Pharaoh exerts his tyranny, what is Pharaoh to Me! I am Jehovah.' Such is the meaning we attach to verse 3. Whether the appellation 'Jehovah' existed or did not exist before, now, for the first time, had they sounded the depths of that Divine name.

Nor is this the only era in which men and nations have showed the surpassing strength to be found in the realisation of God. In the conquest of Palestine, in the building up of the sovereignty of David, in the terrific convulsions of the prophetic age, God, realised as faithful and near, was the one strength of His own. Men ventured all on His promises, threw themselves out in vivid realisation of foretold good, and, in the fulness of an unconquerable hope, lifted their age to clearer spiritual vision and fuller spiritual day. What characterised these earlier ages has marked all the greatest movements of Christian times. The Apostles lived as in the presence of God, believed His testimonies, put to the proof His promises, and, leaning wholly on His power, changed the face of the world. Amid all errors and failures, it was the living consciousness of God, and the strength which that consciousness imparted, which enabled the Church to extirpate ancient heathenism, and lay, on Christian lines, the foundation of modern European life. It was the revival of the sense of God's living presence among individuals, the accentuation of the truth of our responsibility to Him, the rediscovery of the way of grace, into His favour and fellowship, which stirred the desire for religious reform, and finally, under Luther and Calvin, achieved a religious renovation, which, more than any other single Christian movement, has safe-guarded the future of Scriptural

Christianity, and permeated the life of civilised man. All the movements for freedom and enlarged rights, in the progressive nations of Christendom, are its corollaries and outcomes. The spirit which won religious liberty in Scotland, and civil liberty in England, was the spirit of absolute, unswerving devotion to God, which the reformation inspired. The last great movement for human rights, in the abolition of American slavery, was a Christian movement, kindled and sustained, by loyalty to conscience, and trust in God.

Let men say what they please, God, living in the hearts of His people, has been the great factor in all force-subduing, right-exalting movements of the world. And at this hour, the unchanging God, living in the hearts of His servants, who, building on the same promises as the ancient Israelites, are going forth to accomplish His purpose, this unchanging God is carrying on the mightiest spiritual revolutions the world has seen, in the heathen civilisation of the East, and among the most debased barbarians through all the earth. These things are before the eyes of mankind; and yet so profound is the godlessness of this generation, that men are turning back to material comfort, as if that were the be-all and end-all of human existence, and are seeking that by plans and combinations which exclude all reference to the Divine.

Yet whence come the very yearnings of the modern heart, which in these ways they are striving to satisfy,—their impatience with wrongs, their heightened sense of what is due to man as man, their vision of human brotherhood and community of goods? All these, even when most perverted and depraved, are, in the

last resort, echoes of that faith in a fundamental right and good at the basis of this universe, which Christianity has wrought into the consciousness of men. And, therefore, we hold with all the deeper assurance, that not by self-interested strifes of class with class, not by mere external rearrangements of the social organism, can a better and more equable social condition be secured, but only by deeper and surer causes than these,—by this generation coming more and more into the light of God, by our learning more deeply than we have yet learned, what life means in that light, by considering not merely our individual rights, but our mutual obligations as before Him.

Therefore, for this nation in the actual present—yea, for all the nations of civilisation, as for Israel amid the fearful troubles of captivity,—deliverance, comfort, blessedness, are to be found only in God, and in His more widely and deeply realised name. By sinking more into the counsel of God, by bringing our whole lives under His sway,—in these ways, and in these ways alone, can we rise from the troubles of the present to the plane of a nobler public life, and reveal God more fully incarnated in man, by showing more truly human life as it is in the Divine thought. The most pressing need of the hour, then, is the stirring of men's hearts to faith in Him. For the present, as for the future, we require a mighty resurrection of faith in the Unseen. We believe the very world is turning back to the discarded spiritual, as something necessary for the life of mankind. But no new-fangled theories or mere social gospels will suffice. It was the revival of faith, after four hundred years, in an unchanging covenant-God, that saved Israel. It will be the mighty awakening of men to the

unrevoked promises and privileges of our covenant-God in Jesus Christ; it will be the arising of men to claim these privileges, and to live the Christian life more completely than it has ever been lived, while they press on to the fulfilment of these promises, which will make a new and better day upon the earth.

When Moses brought this great word to Israel, they could scarcely receive it for impatience of spirit and cruel bondage. For quite other reasons, what we have been urging, will appear to many utterly foreign to their thoughts. So completely have we drifted into the merely secular standpoint, that we practically assume, these vast social concerns, to be without the purview of God. But that is only our deference to the Agnostic spirit of our time. May God arouse us as He aroused Israel, to an entire and all-comprehensive submission to His will, and faith in His Name!

VIII

THE OPENING SCENES OF GOD'S CONTROVERSY WITH EGYPT

EXODUS vi. 10—vii. 25

WE sought in last lecture to bring out the essential meaning of this great controversy. This is no isolated episode, possessed of only a historical interest, but a great type of those profound moral conflicts which in all ages have agitated the progressive peoples of mankind. God asserts His authority over His people, as limiting the authority of Pharaoh; and thus, for the first time, demands for His worship an independent place in society. His people, as being subject to His authority, demand liberty of conscience and rights of worship under constraint of this superior obligation. These principles, so entirely new, rose so directly out of man's relations to the living God, that when once God revealed Himself, their justice was evident. Even Pharaoh could not but feel a certain stress in these commands.

Moses is thus a protagonist in a great warfare which many moral heroes have waged, which has employed the consecrated energies of not a few of our noblest Scottish saints, which may still need to be pressed to the gate in trying and perilous times.

His weapons are not carnal, but spiritual. His one resource is faith. Look at him as he steps into the arena with his brother Aaron! They are no striplings, like David when he essayed to meet Goliath. The task in which they are to be engaged, is no sudden stroke of physical prowess, but a moral conflict with the tyrannous self-will, the idolatry, the pride, the religious fears, the natural instincts of Egypt,—a conflict sustained by faith alone, through long months of seeming defeat, against enormous odds, till at last victory crowned their endeavours and justified their faith. Only natures inured to the severest moral strains, disciplined by prolonged endurance, exercised in great crises, and built up through all these into an immutability of trust, were equal to a work so great. And, therefore, when we see these two veterans, grizzled with age, but with the unbroken strength of manhood, and much of youth's fire, step into the breach,—Moses being eighty, and Aaron eighty-three, ✓ —the full experience of age having come, without, in earth's still unexhausted morning, age's afflictive infirmities, we feel that we have the true, divinely-chosen workers for this great divine work. Grace fertilises human faculty and sustains human energy. The servants of God still bring forth fruit in old age.

It is worth noticing that just at this point, when Moses and Aaron are coming into line with the covenant purpose of God, their pedigree is inserted, revealing their descent from Levi. It is what we actually are, and what we are ready to do by God's grace, which gives us our place in the kingdom. Though we were descended from a thousand saints, we would be cast out if we resisted God's will. But when in true heart-trust we have taken our place

in the camp of God, it becomes us to prize the godly lineage from whom we have sprung. To be descended from saints, to have the reversion of God's blessing on their faith and sacrifice, is a richer heritage than to have sprung from kings. Even the mighty Moses owed more than he could tell to humble Amram and Jochebed his parents, and so it is fit that their names should be associated with his as he goes forward to his great conflict.

But on another side has this connection with our ancestors great importance. In the roots of family history we often find a guide to, an explanation of, individual destiny. Moses, sprung from Levi, was to originate that ritual in which the tribe of Levi would find its peculiar function and place. With regard to the great men of the world, biographers are always eager to investigate the parent stock, and frequently find in their ancestry a partial explanation of their careers. But in actual life there is, owing to many causes, but not least to the absence of the religious constraint, a powerful present tendency to a sinful individualism, a wanton disregard of family ties and obligations, a self-enclosedness of habit and life,—with the effect that multitudes, given up to the selfish pursuit of pleasure or interest, lack individuality, power of initiation, definite aim; and, like rounded pebbles ground by the ebbing and flowing sea, are polished in the wash of this devouring world into smooth, heartless, conscienceless, time-serving, self-seeking men. Remember, the individual life rises out of the great complex of family life and race life; and in ignoring or ceasing to honour the poor father and the old roof-tree, ancestral reverences and worships, men, whatever they gain from the world,

lose what is infinitely more than all the world to them, the clue to their own individualities, the lines upon which they have been moulded in the very loins of earlier generations, to live an honourable, original, useful life, to the glory of God and the benefit of their fellow-men.

Do you wonder why God repeats again and again these assertions, 'I am Jehovah'? You are no learner then in the school of faith. Trust is the most difficult thing in the world, fully to achieve. We think at last we have learned it, when, lo! self intrudes, and we would fall back in bondage to the flesh, if Jehovah did not again and again so reveal Himself as our portion and hope, that faith, clinging to His immutability, revives and grows strong. Moses is learning. Formerly he was oppressed with his slowness of speech and lack of eloquence; but now that God's awful holiness, and his own responsibility in speaking for such a God, weigh upon him, he has got past the mere idea of incapacity. God will be with his mouth. What strikes him now is the lack of consecration in his speech. 'I am of uncircumcised lips.' He speaks from human impulse, not in absolute subservience to the divine will. He is remembering the taunt of the Hebrew officers. He is putting down Pharaoh's not yielding, to his unworthy pleading. He feels his need of holiness. He lacks the divine fire, consequent on an entirely self-emptied mind and self-emptied lips.

Truly Moses is on right lines. God cannot be served with wisdom, or strength, or genius of ours. While our trust is in one or all of these things, there is a great gulf between Him and us. We must be willing to be nothing, that He may be all in all through us,

every faculty of body and mind being separated to God in the circumcision of a true consecration, to be used or not used as He sees best, with the strength He gives, for the ends which He has appointed ; God being thus, in the most real sense, the absolute master of the soul. But when we are consecrated to God, we are not to suppose that He is with us, only when we are conscious of high spiritual elation or marked outward success. Moses' last experience with Pharaoh was of the most humbling description. We have seen how magnificent were his messages to Pharaoh ! Yet we have witnessed also with what indignity he was treated—rated like a runaway slave, hustled from the royal presence, punished in the intolerable afflictions of his people. Then outside the palace gate, the officers of the Hebrews overwhelmed him with reproaches, calling down on him the judgments of God.

Ay, but God sees not as man sees. Poor Moses, crushed with such ill-fortune, wrote himself down a man of uncircumcised lips. But God saw in the fury of Pharaoh's indignation, a sign that the message had gone to its mark. Would the man have been so angry, if he had not felt the invasion of a circumscribing, controlling authority in Moses' words ? No human being can rise above the conviction of dependence. And when egoism or self-will is inflamed to the most irrational self-assertion, it feels most acutely the shadow of a power which it cannot control. Thus Saul turned to the familiar spirit, and Napoleon to his questionings of fate. And Pharaoh trembled, even now, before the divine power associated with, and issuing from, Moses. 'And the Lord said, See, I have made thee as God

unto Pharaoh.' Ay, when we are weak, then we are strong.

And now, having lifted him up to the serene of His own thought, in which Moses can see His purpose moving on, even amid apparent failure and defeat, God opens up something of His counsel. And here surely He speaks as divine, calling things that be not as though they were, showing us how through the free-will of men He accomplishes His designs, even as through unconscious nature. What He had foreseen from the beginning is now accomplished. Pharaoh, dealt with on grounds of plainest right, has made evident his determination to resist. 'His resistance, however, will not cause My purpose to stand. I will go on to plead with him, though I know that the only effect will be his further resistance, the stiffening of his will, the hardening of his heart. I will prove to him, from every point, his impotence against My almightiness, till at last, by sheer force, opposition will be crushed. Yea, since he will have it thus, his hardness of heart, his refusal to hearken, will be the occasion of such a display of my power as shall serve all the ends which I have in view, in this great new movement. Do not think of Pharaoh, his threats and resistance. Look beyond him to Me, say ever, "He is in God's hand. Jehovah has an end to serve in and through this hardness."'

That was intended to be a mighty strength to Moses. Pharaoh was a discounted force, held in God's hand, carrying out God's purposes, in all his resistance and rage. And now God goes on to show some of His designs, in the great display of miracle soon to begin. In the space of a few months, from August or September, to April, He is to crowd

together, in supernaturally heightened force and impressiveness, many natural providential circumstances, which, coming singly and within ordinary limits, have spoken in every age to the heart of man. There had been reddenings of the Nile, and murrain, and locust showers, and suchlike before, as there have been since. But their number, their rapid succession, their specific destination, their coming at the word of a man, as well as their terrific destructiveness, revealed the finger of God. Oftentimes in our individual lives there are periods when the man's way is hedged in, when trouble after trouble breaks with unwonted severity, till he is compelled to see God's hand, and bow before Him. Here we have on the theatre of a nation a like experience.

In this miraculous intensification of natural troubles, God's primary end was the education of His people. They were being trained to be His covenant people, through whom, in all its developed fulness, God's redemptive purpose would be brought to men. Very soon they were to undergo a moral discipline at Sinai. But moral statute and ceremonial requirement would have done little, if there had not been borne into their inmost beings the profoundest sense of the power and favour of God. No nation, as a nation, was ever so possessed, and dominated by the consciousness of God. There has been but one theocracy in the history of mankind. And in the great agony of their deliverance, by the terrific outbursts of Jehovah's power, this awe-struck sense of the Divine was first awakened. Here was God, visibly and sublimely at work, in the sphere of their daily life, proving His omnipotence by flash after flash of His resistless power. And this was, for them, in fulfilment of a

promise to their fathers many centuries old, the carrying out of Jehovah's gracious design to deliver and bless them. Let those who have known the bounding love of their own hearts, when, after a period of conscious captivity under sin, they woke to realise that God had been working for them, from eternity, in the covenant scheme of redemption and especially in the gift of His own Son, that they might be saved; let such try to realise what the joy of these poor slaves must have been, as they beheld, more and more vividly, the God of their fathers risen for their help.

Then the humbling of Egypt, how that would snap fetters of custom and reverence, which in the long centuries may have been woven! How vividly the moral superiority of their faith would rise before them, when the spell of Egyptian omnipotence was broken, and they saw the once peerless state crushed by the strokes of God! Men have striven with great learning to deduce the influence of Egypt on Israel. After all has been said, however, the remarkable fact is Israel's independence, the enormous moral contrast between the spiritual faith of Israel, with the spring which it contained of highest promise for the world; and the nature-worship of Egypt, without one ray of promise, without one spring of true revelation, without any foundation for a progressive moral education of man. Whatever instruction, in arts and organised life, they carried with them, the Hebrews, roused to such a realisation of the divine, and taught by His prophet, were borne on to the furthest remove from all the most characteristic ideas of the Egyptian faith.

But another end was to be served by this display of power. We read in verse 5th, 'the Egyptians shall

know that I am the Lord.' How that was fulfilled it is, at first sight, difficult to see. In this early age of the world we are still far off from that time, when truths could be propagated from one nation to another. In the infancy of mankind, peoples had not risen to the power, of judging as to their beliefs, and changing one system of worship for another and alien cultus. Their god or gods were the peculiar property of their tribe or nation, and only in Israel was the idea of a universal moral deity beginning to dawn. But stranger than that, not even upon the history of Egypt, did these wonders leave any indelible trace. Indeed, on the monuments of Egypt, there is not one indisputable evidence of the presence of the Israelites in the land. But within the last few years, facts have come to light which help us to put a meaning on these words. We know that the Canaanite tribes, which occupied Palestine before Israel, acknowledged Egypt as Sovereign Lord. Yea, we know that Rameses, during Moses' youth, overran that country in the Hittite wars. And, centuries before, Thothmes III. in the eighteenth dynasty, swept away captives from every part of that land. In these early times, as later, during the era of the prophets, Palestine was like Belgium at one period, the cockpit of the nations, the highway along which the ancient empires went back and forward, in the struggle for supremacy in war. During all the centuries of Israel's history, however, from the time of Joshua to the days of Isaiah, with one insignificant exception, Palestine was kept free from Egyptian invasion. May we not have here, the silent testimony of centuries, to the enormous impression of these great miraculous events upon the people and government of Egypt?

These great occurrences then stand justified, by the magnitude and the imperativeness of the occasion, in the moral history of man. And more, they stand authenticated by their results. How else could Israel have escaped from Egyptian thralldom? Six hundred thousand slaves could not overthrow the armies of Egypt. There were no historical circumstances which gave them an opportunity. Though somewhat declined in prestige, Egypt remained strong after, as before, the Exodus. Then Pharaoh would not let Israel go, for, one and all, these Egyptian monarchs were intensely eager to forego no advantage to their royal estate. Curiously enough, we have a record of a son of the present king, Seti II., pursuing two runaway servants past Succoth and Migdol on to the great wall bounding Egypt to the north. If you look at the whole situation, as it emerges from the mists of the past, you will find no explanation save this, that force of another kind was brought to bear, such a manifestation of the might of the Hebrews' God, as afterwards the Egyptians would scorn to record.

One is struck with the way in which God guides every step of his servant in this juncture, suggesting beforehand what Pharaoh's course is to be, so that they are ready for him. As they had been forewarned, Merenptah begins by demanding a wonder. Naturally he had great faith in his own priesthood, and diviners, and magicians. They formed a cult as powerful almost as the king. And so he clings to the thought, that they will worst the Hebrews in the proved potency of their works. 'Show a miracle,' he cries. The rod of God in Aaron's hand, is suddenly changed into a reptile or serpent. How the magicians coped with this wonder is not quite clear. Their fondness for

craft and sleight-of-hand is well known. They may have cleverly substituted serpents for the staves; or what they cast on the earth may have been serpents, rigid as staves, which suddenly became alive. There was this mighty difference, however. In Moses' act there was the real breaking through of divine power; in theirs, merely the cleverly-devised semblance of such power.

Here we have a parable of what has happened a thousand times in the onward progress of the faith. God, in His educative work, begins with every people where He finds them. His communication of Himself comes to every people, as a sort of force and wisdom with which they think they can cope. Sorcery sought to cope with the wonderful powers of the Christianity of pentecostal days. Later heathen wisdom roused herself, modified and developed her teaching, to retain the intellect of the ancient world. Hinduism at this hour is striving to discover, within her ancient pale, something which, rivalling Christianity in subduing, life-giving power, may satisfy the Indian heart. The semblances of creature wisdom, however, perish before the wisdom that is divine, and the might of God vindicating the reality of His message to man, stands out in grander distinctiveness for every failure of mounting human power.

The wisdom of Egypt has been pitted against the power of God, and even that proud wisdom, which the Pharaoh dare not resist, had to quail. But Pharaoh's heart was stubborn. Born to imperial power, permitted from infancy full indulgence to unbridled self-will, his caprice, his law, fooled to the top of his bent in the maddest conceits of licence and eccentricity, he fancies that by not thinking, by

brushing the matter from his thought, he may wink this opposing will into insignificance. An autocrat, a tyrant, acknowledging no right in inferiors, living for his own sole glory, he will not relinquish the boast of virtual omnipotence, nor acknowledge a power higher than his own. Pharaoh, alas! does not stand alone. He has his parallels in many meaner men. In these last days have we not the all-too-frequent spectacle of men, with the same intolerant self-will, scorning to think that there should be any limit to their liberty to do as they liked, or that they should bow in submission to God.

And now, who is to bend? The Lord says to Moses, 'Pharaoh's heart is hardened, he refuseth to let the people go.' Here we see the true moral character of this act. It is Pharaoh's own act—his sinful act against evidence which should have subdued him. Only God overrules his hardening, for the good of His people and His own glory. And still every step God takes, is in the direction of further subduing and submission. Now we are to enter upon the most sublime conflict between God and man on the great stage of ancient history,—the trial after trial of a long-suffering God to subdue Pharaoh; while with whatever bending, paltering, vacillation, the only effect is a mounting resistance becoming falser, more irrational, more wanton at every step.

Most magnificent is the first stroke of judgment which falls on Egypt, striking at the very heart of the nation's life. You have to travel in Egypt to understand what the Nile is to that people. The whole fertile territory, consisting of alluvial deposit brought down in past ages, is the Nile's gift. Year by year the waters in her broad channel rise, filling the canals,

flooding the flat land, fertilising the entire surface of the soil. Wherever the river comes is a garden, beyond is utter desert. For thirteen hundred miles, flowing through arid sands, or mere fertile fringes on either side, she receives no single tributary ; but along her course she has given broad ditches or canals, running for miles through the green earth, to refresh the vegetation on every side. Every field is irrigated by hand from her streams, or from the wells which she feeds. She yields drink to man and beast, food in her fish, a highway for commerce on her broad bosom. And what she is to-day with Egypt in comparative decay, she was in far fuller measure three thousand years ago. The ancient Egyptians exulted in her benefactions, sang her praise in immortal hymns, raised her to the loftiest seat among the gods.

The king was going down one morning, not only to bathe but to worship, when lo ! on the bank of the river he is confronted by Moses. In his respite from recent humiliations, the tyrant has laughed his fears away. But what is this ? Unabashed, invincible in moral grandeur, Moses is at his side saying, 'The Lord God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let My people go.' Right does not yield, though the assertion of it cease. It stands, it goes on ; the wrong of resisting it deepens. But as the defiance of right becomes more wanton, the majesty of right rises. The whole universe is on that side, and will be spent ere it fail. 'In this shalt thou know that I am Jehovah' : these waters shall be turned into blood, the fish shall die, the river shall stink—yea, the curse shall extend to ponds and pools, and water in vessels of wood and stone. The life of the land, at the uplifted rod of Moses, is turned into a noisome

picture of death. One day passed, with no water to drink, save such as they could secure by digging holes in the ground, none in which to bathe, the fish floating dead to the sea, and everywhere the sight of blood, the stench of the charnel-house. What must their thoughts have been? How could Pharaoh bear to witness, not only his own imperial authority, but the divine power of his gods, completely set at nought?

Have the magicians any might to roll back this judgment? None. Taking some of the water, got by digging, they try to turn it into blood. And catching at this poor appearance of a rival miracle to that of Moses, the king shuts his heart to the groans of his people, blinds himself to the evidence of Jehovah's power, and goes into his palace, where there will be water for him to drink, and every luxury to enjoy. Self-will, egoism, wholly yielded to, is a despicable spirit. What matters who may suffer, while it enjoys a fancied, though futile, mastery of its fate.

Another day breaks, on misery like that of yesterday, but more intense. Murmurs of the universal discontent and dismay disturb his selfish gloom. The dread visitation does not yield. But we read 'neither did he set his heart even to this.' He would not think. Still, he brushes from him, every solitary suggestion, that would limit his consuming passion for absolute irresponsible power.

The seven days came and went, and that stubborn will remains unbroken. The plague passes. Jehovah seems to retire from the conflict foiled. The shadow rolls off, and the king comes forth to life and enjoyment once more. In this plague, also, we see a parable of the unchanging life of man. How many there are,—how many have there been in every age

—whom God must strike in their vital interests, to awaken them to a consciousness of Himself. He made our boasted strength weakness, our vaunted wisdom foolishness, till from the heights of self-confidence we were cast into the mire of self-reproach, before we would come and humbly through Christ receive His salvation. Ay, but there are others who have weathered that storm. They have come out on the further side, self-centred still. They have broken with God, and are living by the light of human wisdom. They talk as if they were emancipated from the past. 'Broken with God!' But has He broken with them? They have a question of right to settle with Him. They are denying the most primitive of all rights, His right as creator to them, to their homage and absolute surrender. To that right He will hold, from that right He cannot recede, for in their submission to Him is the one good for themselves and the world.

IX

THE HARDENING OF SELF-WILL

Exodus viii.

THE moral is the supreme interest of these plagues. God has raised through Moses, His servant, a clear, unambiguous issue, patent to Pharaoh, and yet of perennial moral interest and significance. He has revealed Himself on earth, has a people whom He has chosen for Himself, and therefore He has rights over them which earthly rulers must recognise. And now we are engaged in studying the great struggle by which God, seeking to subdue Pharaoh, and meeting only with ever-heightening resistance, reaches out to His purpose even through that self-will.

In these three plagues we have a most interesting stage in this moral struggle. The play of divine influences on the will of Pharaoh, and the surge and resurge of the soul, are laid bare with wonderful vividness of delineation. We can see an onward march of beneficent purpose in these successive strokes of the divine hand, and deepening induration of character as the direct outcome of wanton, reasonless, and most unrighteous rebellion. Right through we are standing in a moral arena, where God is all righteousness and love, and His creature all self-will, and where judgment

is the reaction on character and life of the man's own acts. The fact that God has a purpose to serve through all this, does not alter the moral complexion of the situation. Here we have no fatalism—no perforce succumbing to an irresistible decree, but a scene of probation, with, on the one hand, the sublime artillery of divine persuasion, and on the other, the fluctuations, the balancings, the final settled resolves of a soul, rising through crises of decision, to a lot, self-determined in the end of the days.

We are then in this theme, at the very centre of the religious problem as it fronts us all. We have before us a sublime instance of a great conflict, through which we have already passed, or through which we have still to pass. Man does not live by bread alone—not by gain, or pleasure, or business, or politics—but only by what comes to him out of the mouth of God, and by what he actually receives of that divine word.

Let us recall the condition of matters at the close of our former study. God had revealed His power in turning the waters of the Nile to blood. And smitten through and through with the consciousness of divine omnipotence, the proud Pharaoh yet remains dumb in unbending self-will. The judgment passes, and the Egyptian king seems, for the hour, victor in the conflict. God does not lengthen out His striving, lest the spirit should fail before Him. From His great purpose, however, He never swerves. Foolish indeed are the men who seek to outrun God. The messenger came back to the Roman king with the Sibylline books again and again and again. And when once our eyes have been opened to recognise God over against us, with His master claim, we can have no cessation in

the moral conflicts of our lives till we finally and definitely yield.

How inexorable is the divine will! Again comes the word. 'Thus saith the Lord, Let My people go, that they may serve Me.' But the words of Jehovah never stand alone. At the back of His least command stands the fulness of the divine power. Very significant are the individual flashes by which He reveals that power. They are more than wonders; they are signs. In every plague, He reveals from some point of view the impotence of their heathen deities, and His own absolute mastery of them. A little while ago He turned the Nile into blood; and now from its broad stream and its marshes there rise innumerable hosts of frogs. As we read these words a personal experience recurred to our mind. Descending the Nile in the beginning of March, we drew up for the night by the river bank, just before sunset. Eager to enjoy a walk on land, we went off towards the town, which we could see, gleaming white through the palms. Wherever the Nile had receded, the banks were sown with leeks and onions. Landward the fields waved with lentils and barley. As we returned in the fast-descending twilight, the heavens aflush with the brilliant afterglow, and earth hushed to utter calm in that flame-like light, the harsh croaking of frogs innumerable grated on our ear. The marshes seemed full. The silence was fretted with this unwelcome intrusion, and we were glad to escape the strident, monotonous tones. That, however, is but a small suggestion of what now transpired over all the land. Ancient writers tell of whole regions being so infested with these creatures, that life became intolerable, and the inhabitants fled from the

visitation. Just such a visitation suddenly, at the word of God, fell upon Egypt. The rod of Aaron was stretched over streams, and canals, and ponds, and lo! in number numberless, they covered the land, rose into their houses, fell sprawling into their kneading-troughs, invaded their very bed-chambers, penetrated into their ovens, were found among their feet, whithersoever they turned.

From the Nile, the fountain of life, springs this loathsome plague. Animals were sacred in their view, and there was even a frog-deity, Heka by name. But maddened by this disgusting invasion they would, breaking through religious rule, crush these pests as far as it was in their power. Are not these nature forces, which they worship, seen to be in the hand of a Higher and Greater, who can do with them as He pleases, and turn them into pests if He will? What have the priests to say to this terrible scourge? Can they by invocation of their deities drive it away? Verily no. They only think of attempting to rival Moses, by appearing to bring forth more frogs. Pharaoh himself turns away from their futile achievement. Nor, we note, does he himself have recourse to his country's gods. He comes to Moses. In a sense, he puts his trust in God. Any one can discern that it is a forced submission. He is crushed by sheer power, driven by dire necessity, to recognise Jehovah's might and to cry for deliverance from His stroke. 'Entreat the Lord, that He may take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice unto the Lord.'

That was miles away from the willing heart-surrender which alone God can accept. Self was not broken; it was only cowed, succumbing for the

moment to superior force. If it could find a loophole of escape, there would be a resurrection of rebellious assertion straightway. Devils believe thus and tremble, without any shadow of emancipation or change. Saul confessed his folly without any turning back to God. There is not one rebel will on earth, which God could not subdue to a forced recognition of His power, by some stroke of His hand. The mouths that speak proud things, the tongues that flaunt their iniquity in the face of heaven, the dis-owners of God, the plotters against His truth and kingdom, could be smitten as in a moment into a compelled realisation of divine power. But to secure that would be to secure little. Such constrained confessions are, in the highest sense, nothing worth. God wants the free devotion of the soul, the spontaneous outflow of grateful and adoring hearts. And so He comes to us in love; He surrounds us with the ten thousand mercies of each recurring day; He touches us into recognition of His favours; He causes to break on our earth-bound lives, gleams and flashes of His grace.

We said that to secure such forced submission was to secure little. But it is something which may be the beginning of more. At least there is an awed sense of Jehovah's power, and a profound conviction that only Jehovah can deliver from what Jehovah has sent. If that could be further acted on, true submission might come. Many a man has been smitten by sheer force, to a constrained acknowledgment, before any melting of heart came.

And now we wish you particularly to notice the magnanimity of Moses. What a commanding position he occupies! But there is in him no pride of

power, no personal elation, no petty desire to triumph over this troubled king. He is delivered from the last trace of such human frailty. He is God's servant, seeking His glory, going step by step in self-obliterating submission to His will. Because, in his own steady view, he is nothing, yielded up wholly to God, has he risen to such majesty of visible power. Of the reality and abiding supremacy of this spirit in him, we have a striking proof in his reply to Pharaoh's request. 'Entreat the Lord,' cried the king, 'that He may take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go.' 'Ah, Pharaoh,' exclaims Moses, 'thou hast now an opportunity of glorifying thyself over me. From one end of Egypt to the other the rumour may run: "Our king has but to say at what time he wished Jehovah to take the scourge away, and lo! it was done."' What a shrewd stroke was that! He gives Pharaoh his royal place; he shows himself eager to conserve and even augment the monarch's dignity; he declares himself willing to be his servant to this end. 'Name thou the day, and at thy word the plague shall end.'

And what said the king? Here is the Nile vomiting forth these sprawling myriads of foul batrachians,—highways covered, houses invaded, and his people groaning under the stroke. Had he not himself said, 'Entreat the Lord, that He may take away the frogs'? Surely, then, when Moses said, 'When shall I entreat?' the king would answer 'Now.' If his heart had been in his prayer, if in his soul there had been one pulse of willing submission to God, that assuredly would have been his cry. But crushed, he is rebellious still. If the sky would only brighten, if there were but a sign of the plague staying, he would resist as before.

‘Let me wait, and see if there be a chance. I cannot, indeed, stay long, for the land stinks, and the people cry out in their misery.’ ‘To-morrow’ is the compromise of his pride and his fear. What a struggle between self-will and dire necessity! But even in saying ‘To-morrow’ he has committed himself to the wish, should the worst come to the worst, to receive Jehovah’s deliverance, and Jehovah stoops even to this. ‘Be it according to thy word.’ He is under the burden of a magnificent divine answer to his own unworthy prayer, and so has had carried home to his inmost experience the impression of Jehovah’s sole and dread omnipotence. Could human love and divine power go further to move, persuade, compel submission? And yet, when the plague disappears, and only in the river are frogs to be found, he goes back to his rebellion: ‘When Pharaoh saw there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them.’

Where, save in God’s word, will you find spiritual anatomy like this? Right through we may discern a wonderful picture of our own hearts, under the drawing of God, if the Divine Spirit had not come in through the gate of our confessed weakness to enlighten and subdue. We have selfish wills that would disown God if they could. What keeps many saying ‘To-morrow!’ ‘To-morrow!’ but just such a compromise between enmity and dread. If the Holy Ghost be striving with any man, let him yield. Let the Divine Spirit have His way with you, that He may renew you in the image of God; else self-will can only harden, under the pressure of divine entreaty, and become falser, baser, more wanton at every step.

Without warning the third plague falls. And to

the Egyptians, who were so scrupulous about both real and ceremonial cleanness, this was particularly severe. Herodotus tells us that every third day the priests shaved their whole bodies, that not one filthy parasite might remain. Yet now, when Aaron lifted his rod, the dust of the land became as it were lice. They came upon man and upon beast throughout all the land. Every one was ceremonially unclean while the visitation continued. They could not appear in a temple procession, or even go abroad. Yea, the sacred shrines themselves would be polluted. For those who kept the sacred bulls without speck or stain, were shocked to find them creeping with vermin.

Again the magicians attempt to rival the Hebrew prophet, but this time without the semblance of success. Strive as they may to produce a fresh wave of this calamity, they utterly fail. The great priestly cult of Egypt stands baffled and overpowered. They cannot wholly conceal from themselves and from others, the fact that they are face to face with a divine power, which they do not know, and which they cannot control. But they have cleverness enough to conceal their own defeat, and to retain hold of Pharaoh and the people by the assumption of peculiar insight. Let me try to paraphrase their thought:—‘Undoubtedly, Pharaoh, this is a wonderful thing. The power of the great God is here revealed. We confess that; and that we have failed to imitate or reproduce it. But need we wonder or should we be ashamed at this? These mighty ones are higher than we can conceive. And may they not have ends or purposes of their own, that have no relation to us, and which we cannot understand? Is

it to be supposed for a moment that, in their bright societies and heavenly activities, they are tied to the rash and blasphemous pretensions of a runaway slave like Moses? What can these past unfortunate circumstances be, but coincidences after all? Think of the gods, sire. This is the finger of the gods. Do not be troubled at the empty pretensions of a man.'

Words like these sounded wonderfully pious, profoundly wise, and Pharaoh hardened his heart straightway. And yet if he had not wanted a refuge from submission, they would have seemed vain and poor. Ay, and there are many in these generations who, with manifest tokens of God's dealing with themselves, and around them in history, are yet trying to turn the edge of individual experience, and to explain away great spiritual movements in the past and in the present, by taking refuge in such vague generalising. They dissolve into illusion the deepest facts of life, especially the regnant fact of obligation. They deride the idea that a man should be directly responsible to God, and that God should have actually revealed His will for our obedience. By way of exalting His infinitude, they remove the sphere of His activity to an infinite distance from man, and then submerge Him from all human view, behind the laws and processes of His own universe. And so they are learning to live as if God were not, to silence the sense of obligation as the voice of God, to disregard sin as an offence against Him, to shut out of view all those highest concerns which have been most intensely agitated through the Christian centuries, to live at best for social ends, according to human standards, and aiming at a terrestrial goal.

And yet, despite all the seeming wisdom of this course ; despite the fact that these are given as the last results of advanced thought, if men would look facts in the face, they, as well as Pharaoh, might see how foolish and ineffectual it is. Pharaoh had one experience which might have convinced him, that in these dread circumstances God was dealing directly with him. Had he not himself cried to God, had he not himself definitely fixed the time when the deliverance was to come, and had it not come according to his word? If he is not to submit to an utter paralysis of the faculty of judgment and inference, must he not trace to the dread power whom he invoked, this mighty intervention on his behalf? Yea, to go further, Moses foretold it, and foretold its cessation at such time as he should fix. And in both the occurrences justified his word. As with the plague of the frogs, so with that of the blood. Now, as Pharaoh must have seen, these are not ordinary events, they are outstanding, special, unparalleled. If he let his mind entertain them, he is shut up to one conclusion, from which only by willing not to see them can he escape.

And so there are facts equally constraining which, if they are considered, must shake the confidence of those who would remove God from all direct contact with men. The facts of the soul will not shape into accord with the new theories. Here is this plague of our hearts, which, if we regard it at all, we must regard as sin, an offence against God. It is making us all unclean,—other in heart and mind than we would like to be. When we are brought face to face with its pollutions, by necessity of the nature which God has given us, we loathe them more than the

Egyptians loathed this defiling plague. Nor can we, when thus confronted with the motions of evil, deny our full responsibility. Until God deals with us, we are in bondage and misery. That God should deal with us in love and mercy is our immediate, our supreme need. Only He can salve our wound, and take our sins away.

These are facts—facts of nature and experience—as much as those facts in the physical order on which men found their theories of law. Why then be untrue to yourselves, and rush after views which materialise life and ignore the deepest concerns? And, acting thus, you are not only untrue to yourselves; you are untrue to history. The greatest movements in Scotland—in Europe—have been spiritual movements. The spring-tides of civilisation have been in those uprisings of the common heart to God, and when God came down into felt, resistless fellowship with men. That with such demonstrations of the reality of the spiritual in human life, and of God's presence in history, men can find shelter from divine calls and appeals in agnostic systems, in fatalistic theories of life, are signs of that mounting egoism, growing with the growth of civilisation, and destined yet to be incarnated in antichrist, who, gathering to a head the forces of self-will, will exalt himself against all that is called God. Men will have to take sides. The whole world must take sides, and the issues are self-sufficiency or submission, the creature or the creator, the world or God. Time must witness that decision, the judgment will reveal it, Christ's sentence will make the choice and its consequences irrevocable, eternity shall behold the evolution of these consequences for ever.

We have been engaged in portraying the gradual hardening of self-will. We have seen how, crushed by divine power, through sheer craving for personal gain, it began to pray. We saw how, as if to lead to something better, God magnificently responded to that cry, overwhelming him with blessing, unmistakably the work of His hand. And yet, when respite came, Pharaoh went back, untouched, unmoved, to his rebellion. He even falls a prey to foolish ideas, that there is no divine meaning in the plagues. If God had closed at this point His striving, could His action have been regarded as precipitate or unfair?

But He knows, as none of us can know, the human heart. Ere He gives up, He will try every ward. No one whom He condemns will be able to point to one unutilised possibility, of moving or influencing him for God. He will go to his own place, made his own by the all-round choice of his soul. Let us illustrate further this fact, by a rapid study of the fourth plague.

The plague of lice had passed gradually away. People brushing the memory of it from them as a horrid dream, escaped gladly back to comfort and peace. The religious routine was resumed. The king said in his heart, 'We have reached the end of these terrible trials.' But one morning as he goes down to the Nile to bathe or worship, thinking of nothing less than of the Hebrews, lo! Moses and the old monotonous demand, 'Let my people go, that they may serve Me.' Thus right and the righteous claim of God keep knocking, pressing their inevitable claim. O futile warfare with the eternal will of God! O base attempt to thwart or resist the right! Sooner

will heaven and earth pass away than one word of the Most High. In war with Him, all our powers will be crushed, as an avalanche might crush a bee's gauzy wing.

The plague threatened is of flies or beetles. Even to-day in Egypt, the traveller is greatly annoyed by these tiny pests. But suddenly at God's word the pest became a pestilence. The land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of flies.

In this dread visitation, where is the priests' fine philosophy? Swept by the rude hand of necessity to ruin. The man knows himself in the grasp of God, knows that God has sent this plague, knows that for his vacillation and falsehood—to ascend no higher—he deserves it. The command of God strikes in, if not to his conscience, to his fear. Look, as money might be extorted from a miser, this concession is riven by force from Pharaoh's heart. 'Go ye, sacrifice to the Lord your God in the land.' But in that there is no recognition of God's claim. Besides, to slay cattle—the sacred animal of the Egyptians—would create a religious revolution. Moses reiterates God's demand, for a three days' journey into the wilderness, for permission to sacrifice as God may command. Pharaoh must recognise that God has rightful claims upon His people, that His people have certain liberties in relation to Him which kings should not dispute.

Driven by necessity, without any recognition of this claim, Pharaoh yields: 'I will let you go, only ye shall not go very far away.' And then comes the pitiful, pleading cry, 'Entreat for me.' Here he is humbled to recognise God's hand, to confess God's claim, to pray for deliverance. But withal there is

no melting of heart, no penitence, no voluntary submission to God. Self-will hopes for respite in that way. It has sunk so far as to pocket its pride and dissemble regarding its independence, when ease and self-interest may be secured. Surely we have, in this incident, a picture of how far the rebellious spirit can carry a man. That very spirit which is in us, which made or makes us so strong to resist God's will, might have gone thus far had not God interposed to delay or prevent. May He give us a sight even now of the vileness and inveteracy of self-will! May He waken loathing that in any measure, or to any extent, a spirit so unbeautiful in a creature, should possess us! May we, through the grace of Christ and by the power of the Spirit, seek a present deliverance!

For notice the destiny of this self-will. At first it may attach to its pleas, a certain dignity and impressiveness. But with every onward step, its radical wrong breaks more clearly forth. We have seen this downward progress thus far, but now we are to have a still more revolting revelation. When the plague of the flies is removed, the monarch who pledged his word to Moses, and who stood bound to fulfil that word, not only by his own royal dignity, but by all the dread experiences of the immediate past, cynically, shamefully, broke that word. Not only would he not recognise Jehovah's rights, he would not observe that most primitive obligation, of keeping his word, to slaves. His lustful, imperious will must be law, and to this everything must give way.

Yes, that is self-will's legitimate outcome. Suffered to reign, it will recognise no right save its own arbitrary wish, nothing sacred save its own caprice, until

there be nothing for it, under the government of God, but the bottomless pit, of ever-deepening subjection to empty, reasonless desires, the man's own undying worm and unquenched fire. May God, by His love and power, purge us from this spirit more and more!

X

GOD REALISING HIS PURPOSE IN PHARAOH'S RESISTANCE

EXODUS ix. and x.

HUMAN character advances to fixity, by distinct stages or crises of moral decision. Between each stage there may be considerable periods of quiet growth outward from the position attained, but in surveying an entire career, it is to these all-determining crises that we turn. They shape the life, direct its energies, and control future decisions. And so the sacred writer sets in bold relief the distinctive resolves of Pharaoh, in response to the claim of God, and leaves in shadow the effects of each on the spirit and mental attitude of the Egyptian king.

Yet each word Pharaoh has spoken, throbbed like an earthquake tremor through him, crystallising into more definite expression the spirit of disobedience, bringing into distincter consciousness the forces of rebellion existing within him, making it easier for him to resist as an affront God's righteous claim, and, when resistance was impossible, to cringe in terror, only to repudiate his promise when the plague had passed away. He has gone far on that downward road in the four disasters already past. In circum-

stances so solemn, souls ripen for weal or for woe with marvellous rapidity, and may stand fully and finally committed to their lot, even in the mid-time of their days. In our belief, Pharaoh was now committed to a policy of resistance. Henceforth, while he may quail before the storm, he never seems to turn. Yea, he has so sold himself to his rebellious instincts, that his passing moods are no indication of what he will do. 'Below the surface-stream shallow and light of what he says he feels' there is the resolve, nursed by repeated disobediences to unconquerable strength, to resist even to the end.

Why then does God continue the trial? There is one lesson which in this self-sufficient age we particularly require to learn, namely, that we are means, not ends, in this universe. Of course we do not hold that we stand in the rank of mere means, like fire and water, attraction and force. God has made us in His image, and given us something of His nature. He also reached out to the ultimate end of His own glory, by a salvation which primarily aimed at our eternal perfection in Christ Jesus. Our highest good then is a subordinate end, even in the scheme of this universe. But that is of the goodness of God. As before Him, we can assert no claim. The creations of His power, we are entirely subject to His will. He has made us for His own purposes, though in deference to the nature which He has given us, He seeks to reach these purposes through our free-will. Should we resist, however, He is not to be turned aside from His purposes. They must and shall be done; and if not through our obedience, then through our disobedience this must be secured.

In all this, however, God, who is Light, confines

Himself to the insistence that His will shall be done. The hardening is the direct effect on the man of his own disobedience. God shines out in truth, righteousness, and mercy as before ; and only through a self-determined resistance of these does the man build up a settled character of wrong thought, feelings, and desires, constituting a stable condition of rebellion. We have here no fate, no positive divine intervention to harden, no eternal decree of reprobation foreclosing or making impossible the free play of will and liberty of choice. Five or six times we read that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, or that his heart was hardened, before we come upon the phrase, 'the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh.'

And what was the Lord's purpose to which He was reaching out through the resistance of Pharaoh? You find this explicitly stated in two passages. Modern criticism will have it that the prophets first raised the thoughts of the Jews from a tribal or national to a universal moral deity, but we learn at chapter xi. verse 14 that through God's mighty acts this was reached at the Exodus. The moral consciousness of God possessed by the prophets, rested on and sprang out of a religious consciousness centuries old, awakened in the national heart during this creative time. Again, in x. 1-2, we learn that by these mighty wonders, God was supplying the religious momentum for the moral discipline which was to follow. There is an aversion to miracle in our day, as exaggerated and irrational as the credulity regarding miracle in former times. Men think they can score them out with their pens, and leave the narratives only relieved of an encumbrance. But they reveal the shallowness of their spiritual perception in

thus judging. It is the easiest thing in the world to shrug the shoulders, affect a scientific breadth of view, and call these miracles legends. But for the truly scientific mind the matter is not so easy. The fact which staggers us, which makes it impossible to reduce this episode in Israel's history within the limits of the natural, may be thus stated. We find a nation of slaves, which for four hundred years had been crushed under the iron heel of Egypt, and which had silently if not tamely submitted to bondage. We find this nation suddenly animated with a new enthusiasm, possessed with an intensely living consciousness of God, so realising His presence and so subject to His will, that they obey His commands, move from home and servile toil, defying Egypt at His word, halt where He would have them halt, go as He would have them go, cross the sea, march through a desert, trusting to manna from heaven for their food, to the winds of God for flesh. There is no other history like it in the world. While among other peoples there have been powerful presences of God, vindicating the reality and the supremacy of the Spiritual, there has been none like this. How did it originate, and that so swiftly, from the prior condition of stagnancy, passivity, and despair? How were, not a few select individuals, such as naturally float up into spiritual altitudes from the superiority of their intellectual constitution, but a whole people—mere slaves from the brickworks, begrimed drudges from the canals—so encompassed and lifted out of the little world of their daily routine, that they stepped forth on this line of loftiest obedience, and as by a trail of light left their mark on the history of the world? If you look the situation in the face, unhampered by

prejudice against the direct action of God in nature, you will find no explanation at all adequate, short of these wonderful intensifications of natural phenomena in the plagues. And if you admit the reality of these plagues, you will see the magnificence of their cumulative effect, and how each contributed its individual share to the common impression.

But it is time that we turned to the plagues themselves. Most convulsions of society do not affect the common multitudes, who are confined to the hard, incessant round of wearing physical work. Though cabinets fall, and dynasties are overthrown, and battle-fields resound with the shock of armed men, the soil has to be ploughed, cattle have to be fed, and in these tasks their lives run on from hour to hour. But these dispensations of God touched every man. As you ride to-day through the green fields, past the mud villages, you can see how dependent each husbandman is, for the labours of the field, on his few animals. The camel is the beast of burden ; the ox, or milk buffalo, a main source of daily sustenance ; the ass, ambling swiftly along the beaten footpaths, his means of conveyance. Without these he were helpless ; with them he is rich. For peace and war, too, the horse, by the better-circumstanced who possess him, is highly prized. When then upon all these domestic animals a very grievous murrain fell, you can fancy the sorrow and anguish which entered every home. The very beast-gods of the land were smitten.

Agriculture in this land has passed into a comparatively secondary place, but there it was everything. In these fat and steaming plains, after the inundation, crop followed crop, and the burdened toilers, sweating

at their ceaseless tasks, and mourning the loss of their helpful beasts, are paralysed. While they are in this anguish, tidings come that over the whole land of Goshen the cattle are safe. The stranger and slave is favoured; they the people of the land are smitten. What dumb, struggling thoughts torment these anguished hearts! Filled with the indignation and rage of injured pride, Pharaoh holds his peace. It would seem as if the misery of his people almost extorted a suppliant cry, but when he learned that the cattle of the Israelites had been spared, his injured pride stifled it, and steeled him to suffer rather than confess weakness or ask a boon. His heart was hardened. Ay, human pride is a terrible thing. Far more commonly than we suppose, this reasonless impulse asserts itself against God, in oblivion of His mercies, in sinful oversight of His righteous claims, indignant that this great Being does not fetch and carry to fulfil its insane desires. Because they are humiliated before the world, because an enemy triumphs, because some object of longing is taken away, men turn in upon themselves, in a proud disdain of providence, and steel their hearts against all love and fear of God. Poor souls setting up the barrier of their own impotence against the Divine omnipotence, and forgetting that this omnipotence is love!

The murrain passes away. But soon to this severe trial a severer succeeds. We do not know in this temperate region what it is to toil all day in the glare of a semi-tropical sun. But in that torrid clime, even to ride forth for pleasure becomes trying after a while. The great heat causes the flesh to burn, and raises slight swellings on hand and arm. The traveller can

thus form a faint, but only a very faint idea of the following plague. That was a great age of building. Going to a furnace then in connection with some building operations in Tanis, Moses stooping down took handfuls of furnace-ashes, and throwing them into heaven, foretold the coming of another plague—boils and blains or blisters on man and beast. This came closer home than even the murrain. Toil is with intense pain. At the busiest time of the year their energies are drained. Egypt is a lazar-house. The proud priestly cult is afflicted with this loathsome disease. Upon the beast-gods Jehovah executes judgment.

‘And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh.’ Here we have a change. Up till now, through all the plagues we read that Pharaoh hardened his heart, or ‘Pharaoh’s heart was hardened,’ or, as we might render it, stubborn. Five times of his own motion this king resisted God. These were as truly his own acts as your resistances to God have been. Yea, all through they were Pharaoh’s own acts, unhindered and free. But now following upon these five dogged individual disobediences, the change in our text at this point is very significant. Let us take from our common human experiences what may throw light on this change.

Have you ever reflected upon the extent to which our actions and characters are influenced by providential circumstances, which we must trace to God? You have passed, it may be, into a condition of morbid gloom. But a friend calls upon you, or gentle alleviating circumstances are thrown around you, or you are touched by the loving hand of special providences into recognition of the kindness of God, and

so you are charmed out of that frame, and recover your cheerfulness and moral equilibrium again. Had it not been for those outward influences, you might have sunk under dominion of these feelings, into hypochondria and insanity. Again, in your youth, you had a very strong tendency to some particular form of sin. Your mind turned to brood upon it. Once and again you were strongly tempted to the guilty deed. But the occasion was denied you, or some diversion of a pleasing or pure kind came in to engage your thoughts, or you were caught in the toils of some obligation to relation or friend, until the fierceness of your desire had passed. And so, through God's providence working with His grace, you escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler.

So does God work in His providence to disentangle us from our own evil, that we may have a measure of liberty with which to choose the good. Praise be to His wonderful wisdom, if it had not been for that, in what imbroglions of sin-bondage might not some of us have been! But having made us free, God cannot thwart that freedom. If, after freeing us once and again, as we have described, we persist in disobeying, He must even let us go to the moral level which we have chosen for ourselves. So, after frequent struggles, has God let some men sink overhead into the sty of sensual pleasure, to find the torment of their lives and the punitive judgment of God, in their own unbridled self-will. And so, after frequent attempts to subdue his self-will, has God allowed Pharaoh to sink completely under the dominion of his own rebellious tendencies, so that without restraint of reason or conscience, they goad him to blind resistance, to infuriate hostility. We have met men so

completely given over to their unbelieving tendencies, that they frothed at the mouth, and burst out in the wild unreason of blasphemy, when they spoke of religion. Surely there is one prayer which all of us, believers and unbelievers, might well pray, 'Deliver us from the dominion of the evil in ourselves!' else the best of us would soon enough get hardened against good.

When we see a man of the kind we have described—a Napoleon, scourge of Europe, or a Nero, hurrying to all excess of perfidy and murder, in the diseased vanity of irresponsible power,—we are sometimes almost fascinated by the wonderful liberty which they seem to have won, through rising above all scruple. But as Shakespeare has shown us with revealing power in the tragedy of Macbeth, the further a man goes on in sin, the more deeply he is involved in the meshes of his own evil impulse, the stronger becomes his impression of paralysing fear, the more surely is he sucked in by the current of his own acts, to his appropriate and irreversible doom. And here, as not even the highest genius has shadowed forth the deep things of the soul, have we the word of inspiration, flashing in that confounding presence and all-controlling will of God, which rings round the man who has thrown off every yoke of duty and constraint of obedience. God is supreme in His own universe, even over those who resist His will.

In the plague about to come we have a distinct note of time. It happened at the very season of the year when the land is now crowded with visitors, February or the beginning of March, for we read that the barley was in the ear, but the wheat was not yet fully grown. In the clear and cloudless splendour of

a spring morning, Moses again confronts the king. The old demand rings out into the still air, just as over each sinful, rebellious life, the heights of what might have been stand out in accusing light. Let self-will swagger and riot as it please, sooner or later the fact that this world belongs to right and God becomes visible as day ; and as an alien and an out-cast from the great sum of existence must it hear their word of judgment: 'I will at this time send My plagues upon thine heart.' And that is not all. No sinner sins alone. The drunkard goes down like a ship at sea, engulfing in misery many besides himself, leaving the virus of his own diseased appetite in the very constitution of after generations. And Pharaoh's rebellion involved 'his servants and his people.'

He and his are completely in God's hand. Jehovah could blot them out as in a moment if He only would. For persons who would defy God and live as they list, sinners should think that they are perilously dependent. Every morsel of food they eat, every drop of water they drink, is carried across as it were an open grave. If the valve of the windpipe did not accurately and on the instant close, that which was passing on to refresh, would suffocate them. And God says, 'Now, if it had pleased Me, I had put forth My hand and smitten thee and thy people with pestilence, and thou hadst been cut off from the earth.' Is it not a solemn thought for every Christless, self-centred, self-willed man, that, ignore God as he may, he is yet entirely within His power.

But why does not God put forth His full power? As we have just seen, this is a man rooted in rebellion,

Yes, but God has a purpose to serve through his disobedience, since he will not give Him a true obedience. He makes the wrath of man to praise Him. Now here we touch a mystery, but it is a mystery in the infinite glory of God, because of the inconceivable resources of the divine nature. He calls things that be not as though they were. He foresees as certain issues which are wrought out by us as free, and so He can say, 'In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up.' Whatever mystery may be, there should be no difficulty, about this. We are free, we plan and deliberate between opposing courses ; yea, sometimes in an excess of capricious freedom, we toy with all possible courses before we decide, and yet we cannot look back on what is accomplished of our personal histories, without seeing that God has been serving Himself through us, and working His will for us and for His cause.

What purposes had God in view in overruling the disobedience of Pharaoh? The Revised Version rightly makes them two. First, 'not to show *in* thee My power,' but 'to show thee My power.' God has a purpose to the evil-doer himself. The light must be so poured in, that the offender, even though he rebel against, must justify God. Yea, he must see his own falseness, wantonness, unreason in rebelling, so that it is known to be pure wrong, even while he chooses the wrong, so that he is shut up in the impotence of discovered evil, self-involved in a corruption that can only deepen and deepen into more festering impurity. Ay, every single rag of self-justification in the sinner will be swept away, and he will see and own his wrong, even while he does the wrong. Shakespeare, through sheer imaginative insight, discerns that this

must be the last issue of sin when he makes Richard, who was trying to justify himself, say :

‘I love myself . . .
Ah, no alas, I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself !
I am a villain’ :

and again :

‘No soul shall pity me :
And wherefore should they, since that I myself
Find in myself no pity to myself?’

If anything in all the world could wean men from sin, surely this consideration should. If love do not move or justice draw, should not very fear drive us to God? Who are we to dash ourselves against the thick bosses of Jehovah’s bucklers?

But Jehovah has another end. As through the fearful sin against light of Pharisees and Sadducees, the glory of God was seen in the face of the crucified Christ, so by Pharaoh’s rebellion, God’s name will be declared through all the earth. Here first the conception of a universal moral Deity began to manifest itself in the history of man.

We must hasten, however. And so, ‘Exaltest thou thyself against My people, that thou wilt not let them go, then——.’ And here follows the announcement of a terrific calamity. While Moses spoke the sky would be as usual bright and clear. Except near the coast, Egypt is almost a rainless clime. Occasional showers of rain and even of hail are not unknown, but in Upper Egypt they are exceedingly rare. Now, however, as Moses stretches forth his rod, the heavens darken, thunder rattles over the affrighted land, from the north terrific snow-squalls, such as we have seen

scourging the Mediterranean into fury, emptied their terrible artillery of hail on the devoted people. Multitudes who took Moses' warning of twenty-four hours, and gathered into the folds their cattle and whatever field-produce they could convey, are safe. But those who mocked at the threatening, are exposed to the full fury of the blast. Still the thunder bellowed, the lightning flashed and burst through the thick-falling hail; when the great fire-balls broke, the arrowy darts seemed to run along the ground, fields were laid flat, palm-trees overthrown, men stricken, cattle killed. As we read, there was nought like it since Egypt became a nation.

A hurried message comes from the king. When Moses and Aaron stand before him, lo! extorted by terror comes the confession: 'I have sinned this time. The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.' Is the hard heart melting? Surely God has wrought wonderfully to this end. Alas, no! We grant Pharaoh has put on a poor mouth. But this self-willed man is becoming more and more a false man. He wants the thundering and hail away, and if a confession can extort that from Jehovah, why, he will confess. Just as a shiftless bankrupt will promise the finest things, without once stopping to think how they are to be realised, just as the drunkard, wishing you to condone his offence, will whine out his mawkish confessions and resolves, having all the while no vestige of penitence or resolution, so this crowned, poor man. 'I have sinned this time.' This time! Pharaoh, if one pulse of penitence were in thine heart, thou wouldest have bethought thee of the other times! Thou art stooping, royal though thou art, to deceive, seeking to

delude Moses into the belief that there are now deeper influences at work in thy heart! But he discerns thy spirit and tells thee to thy face, 'I know that ye will not yet fear the Lord God.'

You will excuse us entering into the details of the next two plagues. We wish to pursue our study of Pharaoh's mind. Again, after relief from the hail, Pharaoh had shamelessly gone back on his word. Moses announces the plague of the locusts. This time Pharaoh's servants intervene. 'Let the men go,' they cry, 'that they may serve Jehovah their God. Knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?' Another mighty influence on the side of obedience—an influence which he cannot resist. Resistance to God has consequences. It stirs up remonstrances. Men who will sin, find themselves involved, in outward and material conflicts, by their stubbornness. But when once the rebellious spirit has got the mastery, instead of yielding outright, how they turn, and twist, and resort to subterfuge, to secure their own ends!

The king sends again for Moses and Aaron. What with his people urging behind, and God above, he has no option. He meets them in the door with 'Go, serve the Lord your God.' Would he had stopped there! But pride and self-will are hard to keep down. He blocks the good impulses to which he had been forced, by a question which spoils all. He allows God to have a claim to their service. He yields Moses' contention, and yet he higgles over who are to go. Is it not so like what we have seen in other cases, when men were being urged to bow to the divine will? But Moses will not abate a jot. God's right is over His whole people, and so young

and old, sons and daughters, flocks and herds, must go. When he sees himself foiled in his crafty scheme to secure their return, he breaks into coarse blasphemy. He mocks at that power of Jehovah, which had smitten him again and again. How far he has fallen, how blind he is becoming! You say, 'Jehovah will be with you. I would like to see Jehovah so with you, that both you and your children would get away against my will. Have a care; you are driving full on a perilous shore. You may tempt me to do what I would not wish.' Poor, proud, palsied creature, he essays to affront the majesty, and array himself against the might, of the Most High!

There could be but one issue. Down comes the plague. With ashen lips this poor king cries for mercy, to insult God by disobedience when the plague is removed. And now there is but one last opportunity of retrieval, before the stroke of doom falls. And surely if all the plagues had a peculiar appropriateness, this one even above the others fittingly shadowed forth the blindness that had fallen on Egypt, and in which they were staggering to an awful judgment. Over that land of sunshine where, day and night, perpetually the sun rises and sets in a cloudless sky, an intense darkness fell—darkness that might be felt. Not unseldom at the season to which they had come, a hot Khamsin blows from the desert, carrying a thick veil of finest sand, and muffling up the light of day. Here, however, every distressing feature is intensified, and especially the darkness is as of night. They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days.

King and people are laid under arrest, compelled

to bow before the might of the divine hand. Only in the houses of the Israelites, was there light enough to enable them to go about their daily work. Again the king sends for Moses. Under the awful pressure he yields God's claims, only they must let their cattle abide. Anything to keep his hold of them. But the issue that has been raised is, God's proprietorship in His own people. And not only themselves but their possessions must be at His disposal. Not a hoof will be left behind.

Seeing plainly the issue, that God will deliver His people out of his hand, Pharaoh gnashes his teeth in impotent rage. He is too angry to make terms, or even to palter with mercy, so as to secure a season's immunity from the divine stroke. 'Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more.' There you have his spirit: no more terms or even semblance of treaty. He will resist to the death.

Even so, Pharaoh pronounced his own doom. 'Truly hast thou spoken,' said Moses, 'I will see thy face again no more.' Next time, from the death-chamber of his eldest son, the urgent message came which set Israel free. Surely we have here a beacon-light for all ages, a revelation of the unswerving righteousness of God,—ay, an outshining of far-seeing mercy! For what an unspeakable loss would have ensued, had the light of Israel gone out under the tyranny of Egypt, had not God carried His judgments to the bitter end! To-day God is smiting wrong and safe-guarding right even as on that early day. 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

XI

DELIVERANCE AND ITS PERENNIAL SYMBOL

EXODUS xi. and xii.

‘AT last the weary strife is o’er.’ The sublime conflict which, for long months, Moses had maintained with the monarchy and priesthood of Egypt, God alone being his help, has now terminated. Even already, when summoned into the presence of Pharaoh during the three days’ darkness, Moses knew that the hour of victory was about to strike. He was so strenuous about not a hoof being left behind, he could speak so unambiguously about the angry, impotent king seeing his face no more, because the Lord had said, ‘Yet one plague more, afterward he will let you go.’

Yea, since no mention is made toward the close of chapter x. of the Hebrew leader going out from Pharaoh’s presence, we must suppose, that verses four to eight were spoken by Moses on tip-toe to depart. What a scene!—the darkness hanging over Egypt, invading the very room where these two met, the lights burning dim in the palpable obscure; Moses calm and strong; the monarch timorous, consciously impotent, but beside himself with rage, and hurling with ashen lips the threat of death. ‘Yes,’ said the Hebrew, ‘thou

hast spoken thy doom. I will see thy face again no more. But not because thy puny arm shall reach to me. Because God's mighty arm shall first have reached to thee.' And then breaks the judgment, the mere telling of which has stirred the human heart in all the centuries since. Thus saith Jehovah: 'About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt, and all the first-born in the land of Egypt—the first-born of Pharaoh, the first-born of shame, begotten of the disreputable drudge behind the mill, and all between—shall die; and all the first-born of cattle.' Is that not a picture—ay, a panorama—in a sentence? And then having delineated the judgment to the eye, he brings the fulness and tension of the agony home to the ear: 'There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, like which there has been none nor ever shall be.' We have seen many of the great monuments of human anguish,—the agony of the strangled Laocoön, the motherly grief of Niobe, the groupings of the condemned in Michael Angelo's, and in Rubens' 'Last Judgment'—but in simple realism, in the conception they impart of a wide, wasting deluge of misery, they come short of the vision which rises to the eye at touch of that sixth verse. As we steamed past the little cluster of mud-huts, standing amid their palms, or thrud our narrow and devious way through their streets, or jostled the meeting crowds in teeming bazaars, the thought came again and again of that midnight cry. The shriek of the horror-struck mother, the groan of the strong man as he feels the still warm body of his lifeless son, the heart-broken wail of the aged, bending over the stay of their tottering steps, the support of their home; Pharaoh in his palace, and his slaves in their hovels, dissolved in a common

woe ; the very beasts filling the air with the dirges of their desolation : across the centuries one seems to hear faint echoes of these sobbing cries, so vividly have the words of Scripture preserved them for all time.

The very foretelling of the misery seems to have wrung Moses' heart. When in two strokes he had thus pictured the unparalleled calamity to ear and eye, when in another he had portrayed the security of Israel safe from God, safe from Pharaoh, not even an ass moving his tongue against them, he lets Pharaoh see all his own servants falling away from him, and beseeching himself, the Hebrew leader, to lead his people out—in order that, revealing his isolation, he might move the monarch at last to yield. But in vain ; and when Moses, meek man and all though he he was, sees this mulish obstinacy, this unreasoning, self-willed resistance to a claim founded on right, and realises all the misery of which that had been and is to be the cause, he loses his measured calm, flames into resistless, overpowering indignation, and goes out from Pharaoh in hot anger.

It is now time to turn to the bearing of this announcement on the children of Israel. Only less than Moses, had they felt the agonies and uncertainties of that time. But now the gloom of trial was melting into the sunrise of victory, and God has a most wonderful way of supporting, by sudden turns and manifestations of providence, His glorious words of grace. The frozen heart of Egypt is melted. The once-despised Israelites find favour in their eyes. The true grandeur of Moses' character has disclosed itself to their view. In this great struggle they feel that the Israelites have been victors. They are

prepared to recognise that they had some just ground for their contention,—yea, if the matter lay with them, they are prepared to part with them on amicable terms. When the Israelites see their erstwhile enemies, practically recognise that their deliverance is as good as consummated, it is easy to believe God's words.

And now ensues a circumstance which, with very slight reason, has been regarded as one of the moral difficulties of revelation. It has been represented, as if God here commands His people to borrow from the guileless and unsuspecting Egyptians, what they knew they were never to return. Now, if that were so, we should certainly have a difficulty in this passage. But what we find is rather a desperate lack on the part of the objectors, of that historic imagination which enables a man to realise a distant and strange situation. Why, the Egyptians were not merely unsuspecting; they were convinced that the demand of Israel to go forth and worship God, was on the point of being secured. Nor could they fail to have their own thoughts, of possible consequences of that out-marching. Moses for his people declared again and again that they must be left free to follow the leading of God. Juster and kinder thoughts were coming into their own minds, of those whom they had hitherto despised as slaves. The inoppugnable might of Jehovah invested His people with something of His glory. In the encompassing splendour of His presence, the Israelites had risen, in comparison with their past, into the dignity, the unity, the lofty aspirations of a nation. And the favour of the Egyptians was a favour extorted by a sense of their superiority through the help of their God, having in it a painful sense of deference, a feeling of eagerness to get rid of

those whom no longer could they hope to subdue. They would give then with open eye, knowing the uncertainties of the future, and that Israel never might return.

And as for the children of Israel, they were walking by faith. They were, at God's sovereign disposal, to be led as He might direct. They knew that ultimately deliverance would come; but meantime, and for the present, they were simply concerned with a three days' journey to sacrifice. And the emergency which dictated the borrowing, or asking, as the Revised Version has it, was very serious and pressing. Ground to the dust, confined to the strictest necessities of life, they found themselves in some respects inadequately provided for their journey. One great need was that of raiment. Then, could they go as slaves to that great function without such seemly apparel and ornament as appeared to them fit? By the readiness of the Egyptians to help, they are encouraged to borrow. In other words, they do not buy, they take as a loan; though in their minds, as among the Egyptians, there is the possibility that the course of events might not admit of a return. The fact was at the back of their thoughts, on both sides, there was the conviction of obligation which, in this rough-and-ready way, might be acknowledged. The Egyptian recognised that what he gave, was but a tardy and inadequate return for the forced servitude of generations. The Israelite was glad to be a debtor, to those in whose flinty bosoms, he saw at last some conscience and sympathy. The whole matter was one of those outbursts of generous emotion, which, on a much smaller scale, we have seen again and again concluding a period of strife.

The wonderful thing is that in full career, during this sublime crisis in the history of humanity, Jehovah should have stooped to suggest this thing. The reason for this specific provision is to be found in the essential character of the movement. In His controversy with Pharaoh, God has (as we have shown again and again) raised a great question of right,—His right as God over His own people, which earthly rulers must recognise—their inalienable rights as His worshippers. Now, as regards Pharaoh, this assertion of spiritual principle failed. Like so many tyrants before and since, he refused to recognise that there was a spiritual sphere into which he should not intrude, and his judgment was near to come. The flower of his army was to be drowned in the Red Sea. In the breasts of the people there is, however, growing up a kinder and juster feeling towards Israel, and He who is watching for every blossoming, or even bare possibility of good, that He might fan it into a flame, seeks to call forth and strengthen that kinder feeling, by creating occasions for its crystallisation in act. After the terrible calamity of which we are to speak, God's judgments on the nation cease. Pharaoh and that military machine by which he did his will, hardened to resistance, sweep on to ruin in the Red Sea flood. But the nation, through this willing renunciation and tardy recognition, have in a fashion ended God's controversy with them, by conceding God's claim.

We must hasten, however. A minute or two ago we described this as a moral crisis. God has raised a great question of right,—His fundamental question in relation to earthly governments,—a question which is as vital to-day as it was in Egypt thirty-two

centuries ago. But we now advance and say that He raises this moral issue because He is laying the historic foundations of a divine kingdom among men. True, this is but a provisional foreshadowing of the great spiritual kingdom of the ages, yet to be founded in Christ's death. But still the foreshadowing is a divine prophetic draft of the eternal kingdom, in its place and on its level, as characteristically of God as that to which it would give place.

Hence the pregnancy of suggestion, in every incident and provision and outline of institution and ordinance. They serve unto the example and shadow of spiritual and eternal things. And first, the hour of deliverance struck, in an absolute promise of God to be believed, rested in, acted on. 'Yet one plague more—afterward he will let you go hence.' They were to start their preparations right away, leaning on the divine word. Here is a very simple, yet, for all its simplicity, a very profound consideration. In all the centuries, the wit of man has never chanced upon it as a spring of renovation for the world. In theories, in vast comprehensive schemes of human advancement, in finer adjustments of received opinion and belief—in these and such as these the intellect of the world puts trust. It would be everything to itself—all-sufficient to the needs and destinies of man. And yet history is full to repletion of demonstrations that great deliverances have never come that way. The culminating hours of history have been the hours when men stood absolutely convinced that God had spoken to them, and when in truest self-emptying they received and closed their souls around, and acted from a divine word, burning its way into their wills, right from the heart of God. These are the creative

moments of time. Then enter into men, thoughts which live, and expand, and operate, for centuries. There begins history,—the history of developing relations and fellowship between man and God. The universal degeneracy of humanity is arrested in those with whom God dwells, an upward movement in the teeth of the down-dragging influences of sin marks their history, the soul escapes from the tyranny of the flesh to loftier levels, and lives a new life in communion with God.

Thus was it in the days of Moses, thus in pentecostal days, thus in the Reformation and in the times of the great Methodist revival. Human life is freshened, human history regains the fervour and the fertility of youth, in simple, direct faith-contact with the living God. Therefore we guard these birth-hours of humanity with a holy jealousy. We will not have these crises watered down or explained away. Such a moral upheaval as we have been describing, authenticates itself by incontestable result. You cannot understand the later revelation through the prophets, until you discern that they are moulded by the influences, engrossed by the conceptions, and fired with the hopes of God's earlier word. In a far later age, amid wreck and change, these prophets stand, with a sublime audacity, on the unrevoked promise of universal dominion to Abraham and Moses. And as they stand with unbending front, holding to the impossible, refusing to let God go till He realise His word, lo! on the warp of their unshaken faith, the Spirit of Inspiration weaves the glistening woof of Messianic hope, and their cries become songs.

A word of God believed in is always the beginning

of a new life, the starting-point of a new history. 'The Lord spake unto Moses saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months.' Now we mark here a wonderful thing. Not only does Jehovah begin with a promise, to which He demands practical adhesion (that He always does), but before the deliverance comes, He announces a symbolic ordinance as a memorial of that deliverance. He commands them to enter upon the performance of that ordinance, while Egypt lies secure, and not a sign of judgment is beheld. And only when the lamb had been slain, and the blood sprinkled on the door, and the passover sacrifice was being eaten, did the stroke of judgment fall.

Now we can see many reasons for that course. It tested, and as the result proved, it called forth the faith of the people in the divine word. It did that also in the most impressive way, by an act. Forms of words might be forms to many. You cannot secure by any confessional statement, that it is made with the understanding and from the heart. Every father, however, that gathered in his family, and slew his lamb, and sprinkled the doorposts, and ate the sacrifice as prescribed, gave the fullest external pledge, that he stood seriously committed to believe in the impending judgment and deliverance of God.

But the chief reason remains. The ordinance contains the soul of the deliverance,—its great, permanent, underlying principles, so enshrined as to be a perennial means of religious and moral education. Reduced to its naked elements, the deliverance was a material killing of so many first-born sons, and on their part a material escape. Beyond awakening a temporary emotion of gratitude, it might have had no

permanent moral effect. Taken in connection, however, with God's arising for their help, and His revealed purpose, it was fitted to have an influence profounder far. It was the birth-hour of their nation, the starting-point of a divine kingdom; and as such the passover enshrined and made permanent in their lives the cardinal features of that birth-hour.

Yea more, there was in it an expansive, educative force, which developed as they grew in perception of moral realities down the ages. God's way in dealing with the religious nature of man is to throw into the world of human life a divine creative idea, to allow that idea to establish all sorts of relations with human experience, and then to interpret this wealth of experience to the intellect. At first what filled their hearts was an intense but undefined joy at a sublime deliverance. God, by the sheer magnificence of His power, had broken off their fetters. The captivity of four hundred years was at an end. How dramatic the incidents! The deep night, the blood-stained lintel, Egypt wrapt in unforeseeing slumber, Israel foreseeing and awake, the midnight stroke of doom, the silent sweeping flight of the destroying angel; death in the city, death in the lonely hamlet, death in the palace, death in the cot; on the moored barque of the sailor, in the clustered tents of the desert wanderer—death!—death! The while, within the huts of Israel, there is light and stir and peace. They feed on the flesh, whose blood, shed for them, has kept them safe. Life and vigour for the unwonted task before them, comes from the substance of that offered life. With the sweet flesh they mingle bitter herbs in sign of past sorrow, unleavened bread in sign that they have broken with the leaven of idolatry and

bondage, and they eat, girt up, and staff in hand, as about to step into liberty. Just then the hurried, agonized message came from Pharaoh,—just then the Egyptians broke in on them, urgent that they should depart; and just as they were, with their dough unleavened and their kneading-troughs, they went out through the blood-washed doorposts to liberty. And the past was a dream.

That was enough to write the story of that deliverance on the hearts of a generation. And thus lodged in memory, this institution was capable of expansion, as the divine discipline opened their eyes to the full content of His purposes. When, in the rough experiences of the desert, they found out by sore trial their own unworthiness; when, at Sinai foot, though bound in a covenant with God, they trembled before His awful holiness, then this ordinance took on new meaning. It was not from the sword of the Egyptian, but from the sword of the angel of God, that they were delivered. God might have righteously cut them off, as He cut off the Egyptians. Their lives were forfeit as truly as those. Only by the blood of atonement, by a life offered for them, could they escape.

And so the thought of mere deliverance was passing more and more into the thought of salvation from sin. Even they could only escape death through an atonement; even they could only enter into covenant with God through the sprinkling of blood. And they had thus entered, that they might live before God and do His awful will. How they had forgotten and ignored this in the days of their bondage! All the more, then, must they now put away the leaven of sin, and seek to be unleavened—weaned

from the world, and in the whole tenor of their lives yielded up to God.

So elastic and pregnant with growing significance, as the purpose of God ripens, is this ordinance. Again, at the beginning, this was a family ordinance. In every household the lamb was slain; every soul must be sheltered by the blood. And in this sense it remained a family ordinance to the end. But when they entered the promised land and the central sanctuary was set up, the families came from every corner of the land, brought their lambs to the temple, and had them sacrificed there, while the after-meal was eaten in their hired houses. Here we see an element entering in which has no explanation in the past, but only in the future. They are being gathered in this individual commemoration of deliverance and salvation, round the central sanctuary; in their vast assemblies, collected from far and near, they are made to thrill with the sense of national unity and the glories of national hope, because, all unknown to themselves, but in the counsels of Him who had planned the whole progress, they are being carried on to the time, when the one great paschal Lamb, offered during the passover season, should bind men into one, not only with themselves, but with God, in the joy of eternal salvation, in the bliss of divine life and holy communion.

And then at last upon that night, prelude of our Saviour's agony, there burst forth, in full splendour of significance, the meaning of that imprisoned parable, the passover ordinance, which had been growing in significance with the advancing centuries, onward to this fulness of the time. Not that, even then, the disciples understood all. When in that solemn eventide they

gathered to their evening meal in the upper room, and when, according to custom, which had crystallised round their ordinance, they sang psalms full of the victories of love and grace, they knew themselves on the edge of some wonderful event which they could only dimly apprehend. When at last, however, the events of the crucifixion had passed, and a risen Christ had given His own commentary on His sacrifice, then as from a vessel of frankincense suddenly broken, all the meaning enclosed within this ordinance, by an all-seeing God for future times, broke forth. Then by Christ's light men saw in the fatal inveteracy of their own sin, the judgment from which they were delivered; then they saw the Lamb without blemish who could take away sin; then they could enter into the application of the blood, not only to the home but to the heart. Egypt and the judgment of that dreadful night faded away before the more awful judgment of sin, and of that death angel, who, not on one night only, but every day and every night since man fell, has been cutting down young and old, black and white, all the world over, so that not a moment passes, which is not marked by a death-sob and the vanishing of a life. Within the blood-marked covenant of grace they were secure even from him. In the deepest sense, they could not be touched with his dart. They were eating by faith that flesh given for the life of the world, through participation in which they had even now passed from death unto life.

How glorious that ordinance must have appeared to Christians in the fresh light of pentecostal days! What a deliverance was theirs, of which even the sublime deliverance under Moses was but an earnest

and forecast! And even in the subordinate incidents, what a wealth of meaning remained! To what a sorrow for sin were they bound, by every eating of Christ's flesh, in every realisation of eternal life through Him! Bitter herbs!—ay, who can refrain from chewing the cud of bitter reflection, when all the past mounts up before our souls, and we recall the vileness and folly of earlier years? And to what a life of separation from the leaven of sin were they committed by appropriation of His great sacrifice! Lastly, in the light of the Christian hope, what could they be but pilgrims and strangers here, passing out of bondage into liberty, till full liberty be won!

Thus, leaving much to be dealt with in after lectures, have we carried you on through the ages, to see the progressive life and the glorious culmination of this passover sacrifice. Not half enough is being made in our time of these great unities of revelation,—unities of divine purpose, touching and including the most distant points of the Kingdom of God. There they are—indissoluble, unmistakable. You cannot mistake that which we have just described for aught else than the age-long growth of a divine plan, known from the beginning, consciously approached by a divine spirit, who in every fresh advance took full account of all that was to be.

Whatever theories you may form as to the building up of the letter, this great indestructible unity of spirit and aim abides; and this is the material point, to which theories of structure must defer, beside which they are insignificant.

But one word ere we close. Can we not carry from our study of this section, some practical reflections of the greatest moment for all? First and last,

in Egypt and at Calvary, the Kingdom of God is founded on grace. We can only enter in through believing appropriation of this grace. Then this grace is revealed, in deliverance from the judgment of God, due to us for sin. We can only escape from the anger of God by a life offered for us. We can only enter into covenant through the sprinkling of blood. Liberty is through sacrifice, life through death. Have you entered into these sublime truths? Are you by faith covered with the blood of atonement—by the righteousness of God's Son? Secure through covenant-mercy, are you living on Christ by faith, sorrowing for sin, weaned from the world, pressing to the mark for the glorious prize? There is no other footing in God's kingdom. 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one cometh unto the Father but by Me.'

XII

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PASSOVER FEAST

EXODUS xii. 43. 'This is the ordinance of the Passover.'

WE return to the subject of last lecture, to note the characteristic features, and to learn the lessons of this great feast. We are standing at the fountainhead of the history of the Chosen People. We are passing in review experiences which would be felt as creative during their entire future. This is evident throughout the narrative. 'Ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance for ever.' 'Keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations.' 'It is a night much to be observed unto the Lord, that night of the Lord, to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.'

We sight here a great Biblical idea, which we in part grasped on a former occasion. The ruling idea of this generation is evolution. But the evolution of science, as must sooner or later be recognised, is separated by the broadest contrasts from the majestic evolution of revelation. In saying this, we quite recognise, that at this present time, the strongest and most sustained efforts are being put forth to describe the evolution of revelation and religion, according to the general principles of that scientific evolution, which finds in one or a few primitive forms of life

the beginning, from which by natural selection, under pressure of a ceaseless struggle for existence, all the varieties of life, vegetable and animal, of mind and of conscience, have been developed. The records of revelation are being pulverised into fragments, to admit of revelation being included in the general scheme of evolution upward from below. But without pronouncing at all on this new theory, on lower levels of life, what we have to say against all efforts to make this revelation a natural outgrowth, like Confucianism, or Brahminism and Buddhism, of the religious consciousness of mankind, is this, that revelation contains, broadly written on the surface, saturating it through and through, its own divinely original scheme of evolution.

This book, however it may have been brought together at the first, is no collection of fragments now, but a great articulated and organically developing unity. One vast increasing purpose runs through the whole, which can only be ignored by setting at nought that purpose. And at the beginning of that growth, there is a true intrusion of the divine into the sphere of the human, a real communication from God to man,—in other words, a revelation. We cannot, for ourselves, allow the all-dissolving analytic faculty of science to explain away that creative fact. We can front any court of reason that can be set up, with this assertion of the reality of revelation. For He whom we allege to have revealed Himself to Moses, is revealing Himself to human hearts, is proving His power in new spiritual creations of redeemed men, is witnessing in their redeemed souls to His own existence and character, by gifts of grace and power, and is witnessing through these millions, to the world, the

reality of His transfiguring presence in human affairs. These facts, issuing as spiritual effects from this great word, which reaches back in its organic unity to the days of Moses, authenticate what we read of God's sublime action in Israel's deliverance, and of His plan to make that deliverance live as a spring of religion in the popular thought.

Now we can discern the Biblical scheme of Evolution. It does not start from below, but from above. The fertilising element is a thought of God, expressed in promise or act, coming down from above into the network of man's ordinary thoughts and judgments, establishing new and transfiguring relations with every side of that life, provoking mayhap rebellions and oppositions, but gradually shaping the life to some truer and loftier form, because of this manifestation. This creative word or deed works in individuals, deepening the sense of God, drawing out the hearts of men to Him, and so beginning a new religious communion and inter-relation between God and man, in which God goes on to act toward them so as to educate them to an ever-growing and profounder apprehension of His purpose, and in which they respond to Him in affection and service. Passing from individuals, this sacred history of God's dealing with His people broadens into great institutions, affects generation after generation; and as they, under the heavenly discipline, grow up into loftier perceptions of moral realities, blossoms into new poet and prophet-missions by which they are led into still further vision of the divine purpose and will.

In last lecture we saw, regarding the passover feast, how, enshrining the very soul of this deliverance from Egypt, it grew in meaning age by age, as

the people were being educated in moral realities, till at last the full significance imprisoned in it, broke forth in the atoning death, and in the symbolic supper of our Lord.

Let us hold fast those great creative moments in the history of revelation. Let us fasten on the essential and vital thing in revelation—this unity of purpose running through all. Let us take the Bible's own account of the true spiritual progress of man, namely, from the starting-point of a divine revelation, working itself slowly and by degrees through a specially prepared history, into the minds and lives and intellects of men. Christian progress began with and from the divine datum of a Christian revelation, into the meaning of which the Christian nations have slowly entered, century by century; which they only very imperfectly understand to-day. And the religious history of Israel began with the divine datum of a revelation through Moses, into conformity with which it only after a long period came.

And these great reigning convictions have special value in other respects. If the progress of revelation be a progress in the hand of God, originating in some act of divine grace and power, and advancing by definite stages, as the people grow up into an understanding of the things of God, then it follows that everything that is provisional and temporary in the earlier stages has a reference to the great end, to which in clear self-consciousness God is moving on. In other words, they are types serving to shadow forth heavenly things,—within their own more limited and material meaning, containing an emblem and prefigurement, of truths which reach their complete expression in Christ.

It is in this light, then, that we wish to look more in detail at some characteristic features of the pass-over feast, as they are sketched in various passages scattered through chapters twelve and thirteen. This is the ordinance of the passover.

First. It was a feast in memory of a divine deliverance. The two great dispensations of the divine kingdom began in two sublime acts of divine grace—that of the law in deliverance from Egypt, that of the gospel in salvation through Christ. But it is obvious that there is a great difference between these two. The former is more limited, on a lower level, being material in its nature and immediate end. What happened on that dread night when the first-born of Egypt were slain was, that Israel escaped from material death, and was liberated from grinding servitude and bondage. Now, striking though these events were, if we confine our attention to them alone, we can see that they might have come and gone without exerting any profound influence of a moral and spiritual kind. When the Black Death devastated our country, the trembling remnant, escaped from wide-spread slaughter, were not lifted up into a new life or animated with loftier hopes.

We would misapprehend this act, however, if we looked at the material circumstances themselves. This stroke of the divine hand had been preceded by a divine preparation. The dormant religious life of these people had been stirred. Memories of covenant promise to their fathers had risen from the dead in a glorious dawn of hope. Through Moses, by attestation of miracle, and more strikingly still by successive thunder throbs of judgment in the plagues, they were aroused to an awe-struck

realisation of the fact that the God of their fathers had risen for their help. Men have professed to disbelieve, in the possibility of a whole nation moving, as Israel is said to have moved, in the Exodus. But they take not account, of the sublime pressure of such great thoughts upon the minds of these men. And when the clock struck, and the liberating stroke of judgment fell, Israel, observing the festival of their deliverance in the moment of their deliverance, knew that Jehovah had put forth His power, not merely for their liberation, but that they might pass forth a free people, into covenant relation with God, to be disciplined in peculiar fellowship for special and glorious service.

And, heightening this sense of relation to God, while the deliverance was a common deliverance for the whole nation, each family, and for that of it, each individual, was sheltered from the judgment of God by a life offered for him, and passed into liberty through doorposts sprinkled with atoning blood. He might have been as the Egyptians were, but God, his God, provided for him the means of escape.

And so a meaning beyond that of time was evolved from this agony. Israel was bound to God with an unrivalled intensity, as they saw God, in this outflaming of His power, marching on to the fulfilment of His purpose in them. That night was the birth-night of a nation—yea, more, unspeakably more—even the birth-night, in a very real sense, of the kingdom of God among men.

And as from the heights of God's completely revealed purpose in Christ we look back on that epochal hour, can we not see in the great lines of that deliverance wonderful coincidences; too precise to be

fortuitous, with that other far grander deliverance in Christ, hidden, as yet, deep among the folds of a far futurity, but clear to the eye of God? True, when we enter into all the meaning of this salvation of Christ, in which the kingdom of grace found origin, even that great historic deliverance of Israel sinks into insignificance. What is that slaughter of the first-born in Egypt, to the veil of death spread over all nations? what that bondage under Pharaoh to the universal bondage of mankind under sin? and, chief of all, what the poor material symbolism of the unblemished lamb, the shed blood, the sprinkled doorpost, the feast upon its roasted flesh, to the great New Testament reality of the stainless Son of God, offering Himself to God, for a propitiation—that by His blood we might be brought back from condemnation to righteousness, from estrangement to sonship, and might, through participation in this sacrifice, partake of eternal life?

We are still on the floor of earth, in the region of material types. But the correspondence is so close, with the subsequent spiritual and eternal realities, as to demonstrate the existence of a unity of purpose and the presence in the planning mind of a foreseen goal. And this runs right through to the end. Yea, to adduce a further and very convincing point, the full reasons of the particular collocation of circumstances in the type, is not seen till their correspondence to the essential features of the spiritual anti-type is discerned. The necessity for the lamb's being unblemished was not understood, till we saw, in Christ, that a perfectly sinless one could alone make atonement for sin. The connection between the sacrifice of a life and escape from divine judgment,

could only be dimly and provisionally discerned till, in the death of Christ, we saw a complete victory over sin, an exposition of perfect obedience, and therefore an immeasurable spiritual worth, with infinite power to atone. The connection between the blood-sprinkling of the lintel, and safety and liberty, was simply a thing of statute, having no inherent or necessary sequence till we discerned how faith's appropriation of Christ's sacrifice, actually brought us out of subjection under sin, into living union with Christ, and started a new life of fellowship with God. Christ, the paschal Lamb, supplies the key to the whole passover ordinance; and in His salvation through sacrifice, we see the eternal realities, which were shadowed forth in material type from the beginning.

Yet the material emblem or type is not a mere foil to set off the glory of the complete fulfilment in the Gospel. In other words, the type is not a desecrated temple, whose ruins show what once it meant, and to what it pointed in the far off-time. Even when the fulfilment has come, the type is still a thing of life and power. By its concreteness, by its material objectivity, by its pressure on the imagination and the heart, the type invests aspects of the finished revelation, with the vividness of material reality and the splendour of historic circumstance. As God has glorified Himself in nature, by breaking up the unity of white light into million-fold variety, in the phases of colour, in the greenness of the grass, the blue of the sky, the yellow of the waving cornfields, the countless tints of the flowers, and the purple, investing like a dream the distant hills, so He has broken up the sunlike splendour of revelation in Christ into the million-fold variety of incidents, institutions,

histories, persons, filling the Old Testament, lighting up at a million angles its perfect globe of truth. For private profit, for popular instruction, as well as for a scientific grasp of truth, we cannot leave out of account the pictured record of the past.

How vividly that dread night in Egypt brings home to us our exposure to judgment; with what a flash of realism that blood-sprinkled lintel shadows forth our debt to sovereign mercy, our deliverance through atonement! Look in upon that bright interior, with atmosphere of peace, and joy of feasting, the while death is pressing into every Egyptian home, —does it not suggest our blessed security in Christ and the gladness of new life begun? Let us come back to the full use and enjoyment of this, as of all other sides of the word of God. While our daily and oft-frequented resorts, are Bethlehem and Gethsemane, and Calvary and Olivet, may we not forget Mount Moriah, and Goshen, and Sinai, and the tabernacle service, and Joshua's victories of faith, and the glories of dawning sovereignty in Israel! While so interesting in themselves, they have upon them a light of meaning and purpose from a far-off day which had not then dawned.

Second. It was a feast which, shutting them up to a divine deliverance, was designed to sever them from all contact with their past. This is seen especially in the significant development of this ordinance. The first celebration of the passover was confined to one night. The killing of the lamb, the sprinkling of the blood, the eating of the roast flesh with girt-up loins, were the chief observances. But mingled with these was one, which, though at first subordinate, grew in the after institution, to be, if not the first, the pervasive

characteristic of the feast. Leaven was put out of their homes ere the lamb was sacrificed. You cannot come to shelter under atoning blood until, in resolve at least, and so far as is immediately practicable in act, you determine to have done with sin. And when the blood was sprinkled on the doorpost, and safe within, they began to eat the flesh, it was with unleavened bread. You can have life from the atoning death of Christ, only as you renounce and repudiate sin, and abide weaned from and dead to its impulses and allurements.

Such was the profound symbolical meaning bound up with the most primitive form of this institution. Sacrifice meant separation from an enslaved past. By ordinance of God, however, the feast of one night developed into a religious festival for seven days. In this completer form it was to be observed during all coming time. And wonderful to tell, this extension consisted of an immense development of this very idea of holy separation. Of course the original element of the paschal sacrifice was preserved, but in the forefront of the ordinance stood this,—that for seven days they should eat unleavened bread.

Of course the Israelites did not understand all that we mean by renunciation of sin and separation from the world. The putting away of leaven meant only breaking with a familiar Egyptian custom. The eating of savourless unleavened cakes brought home the fact that, in going out into liberty, they were renouncing what were hitherto the familiar occupations and concerns of their lives, and were passing on to a new service and under a new yoke. And this bread was eaten, not once or twice, but each day, and for seven days,—a familiar cycle of life being

taken up in this way, to show that this was to be the reigning character, and quality, and condition, of their whole life henceforth.

We do not know whether the reader is much impressed with this, but we are struck with profoundest awe, recognising the sanctity of God, which shines through all revelation, unspeakable, incomparable, in this striking provision. Here you have what differentiates the Bible from other revelations—its burning holiness. That Holy One, whose great aim is to separate men to Himself, and who, from the beginning, has been reaching out through the ages to the realisation of that perfect separation by the sacrifice of Christ, has made His earlier deliverance of Israel a means of a real, if outward, separation from bondage, and a glorious emblem of the perfect separation to come. And so perfect is the exhibition in symbol, of this truth, that there is much concerning the holiness of God still to be learned from this institution. What a searching purity is in Him! 'Who-soever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation.' You cannot make appeal to the blood of Christ, while you are clinging to any known sin. You cannot have life from Christ reigning in your heart, while any pollution of sin is willingly yielded to. Yea, the leaven of sin must be put out of your life, as out of your heart, out of your home, out of your business, out of your public actions, out of all your relationships, if you would dwell with God and feed by faith on Christ. You must live as unleavened, as separate to God, not seven days, but all life long. Not that life will be on that account without relish and dry. Glorious though the symbolism of the passover be, it can only reach to

the lower and negative side. We are separated to God, not by an external ordinance, but by an inner and an abounding life, by the glorious and holy leaven of Christ's influence and example and Spirit, lifting us up to a fulness of communion, and into a rich, many-sided life, besides which all the glories and engrossments of earth are tame and poor.

True, even for us the bitter herbs have their perennial significance. Though they were no new sins (and, alas! how many there are), every advance through surrender into a fuller understanding of the holiness and love of God, kindles a new sorrow and indignation at the wantonness and heinousness of all evil, and of our evil, in the sight of a holy God. And even now, when we have come by the spirit into such real fellowship with God, we must still eat with girt-up loins and staff in hand. We have not attained. The unsubdued flesh is still in us, and a militant world is round about us, ready to bring us into bondage. We maintain our freedom by renewing our surrender, and by escaping through ever fresh surrender into the liberty of fuller submission.

Have we not reason to bless God for the great type of the passover feast? But there are one or two accessory characteristics of which, in conclusion, we must briefly treat. In connection with this feast God enunciated the true principle of parental instruction. Here we see how a parent may best bind his children, humanly speaking, to his own God. The bond between parent and child is a personal bond. Through his own dependence on his parent, and touched by that parent's love, manifested in constant watchfulness and countless benefits, the child is drawn out to his parent in boundless trust and affection.

The father or mother, then, who does not utilise this personal bond, or draw upon that trust and love, in communicating religious instruction, fails to use the very sceptre of parental power, gives away a matchless advantage, given, and mainly for this highest end, by God.

There was to be nothing esoteric to the children in God's kingdom. They were present at the passover feast, and, when their young curiosity was excited, then the parent was to breathe the sacred pride and burning passion of his own heart into the heart of his child. He was to tell him in the hushed tones, and with the heartfelt enthusiasm of a participant, of God's singular love to their people, and of the wonderful deliverance wrought on their behalf. Nor would touches of personal appropriation be wanting, letting the child see how, in the father's thought, the blessing affected them, what blessings it had brought, what knowledge it had imparted, what place and influence it had given.

How that story, thus told, would bind them to their country's cause and their father's God! May we not have in the universality of such instruction, one main reason of that marvellous persistence of the Jews in their fathers' religion, after they have been deprived for many centuries of the enlivening presence of God. Would that we might learn something of their secret! How many sons and daughters of Christian parents, have cast or are casting their parents' religion behind their back! How many at this moment, in varied forms of pleasure, deliberately set at nought the sacredness of the Sabbath! How has Christian parenthood lost so much power? How has the Christian home so far relaxed its authority, as to

have ceased to be in many instances a nursery for the Church?

Let Christian parents realise 'that they have baptized their little ones into Christ's name. They belong to Christ, and Christ's Church belongs to them. Do not deprive them of their baptismal rights. Bring them to the house of God. Let the Spirit's presence in ordinances, blow upon and stir their young hearts. Nothing, not even attendance at Sabbath-school, must stand between them and regular weekly attendance with their parents in the place of prayer. You do not know what formative influences your children may miss through carelessness like this.

And when any thought from the divine stirs their minds,—and very soon such thoughts come, for, as Wordsworth sings,

‘Heaven lies about us in our infancy,’—

breathe the faith, the love, the hope of your heart into your child. Let it be no mere cold catechism, and wearisome task-work of psalms and texts. Lay your heart bare to your boy. Let him see the great facts of religion, in the glow of your overmastering trust. Communicate to him those deep life-convictions of yours, which have their centre at the Cross. Bring him to your own spiritual points of view, from which to show him how all life lies for you in the light of God. Make the Cross mighty, and real, and near, in the vivid presentation of your own experiences, and deliverances, and joys, and forecasts of joy. Man! what in all your existence is so worth while as this? Your position, your business, your balance at the bankers! Why, they are the veriest trifles. Soon you shall be far beyond them, if they

have not first left you. But in that mere boy, in that girl, you touch eternity. Stooping to train them, you and they are standing midway between two infinite possibilities, the heights of heaven and the depths of hell. If we had our choice we would rather die, on a borrowed bed in a strange hospital without a penny, than go up from a palace, with the record of a careless, indifferent parent, to meet the King.

In conclusion. No stranger was to eat of this feast. Unless they knew God, and were committed by circumcision to the worship and service of God, what had they to do with this feast? Israel was being delivered to serve,—to come into new and loving relations—and therefore only they who knew God could communicate such a deliverance. And so we have been saved in Christ to serve. We are forgiven, renewed, counted righteous, made sons, that henceforth we might live unto God. We commemorate the Saviour and salvation, because they mean all this,—not only salvation from sin, but salvation to life. Let the unforgiven, the unrenewed, the unsanctified, stand far off from our commemorative feast.

We wish you to notice one thing, however ; even in that earlier day, and amid Jewish exclusiveness, there was no absolute barrier of race. If the foreigner and the males of his house were circumcised, if they committed themselves to God's service, they might partake. What a glorious foreshadowing, of the truth that faith was to make all men free of the kingdom of heaven ! But better remained,—when through circumcision they entered the commonwealth of Israel, no difference as regards this feast was made between

the stranger and home-born. What were then only parables and shadows, are now realities. We ourselves are sons of the stranger, who have been made to inherit the privileges of the Father's house. And therefore are we qualified to say to all, even to the outcasts of the race : ' All things are ready. Come to the feast.'

XIII

THE FIRST-BORN, OR SALVATION AND SACRIFICE

EXODUS xiii. 1, 2, 14, 15

EGYPT, all unconscious, is under the shadow of impending judgment. Israel, wakened at last into vivid realisation of the divine presence, knows itself standing on the brink of liberty. Far more than emancipation, however, was to be secured by the event now so near. They are passing from Egyptian bondage, into a national state of communion with God. Jehovah was to dwell in their midst, building up the necessary moral foundations for the world-wide kingdom of God.

And having this great world-purpose full in view, Jehovah is careful, even before the stroke of judgment falls, to fix in their minds ordinances and institutions, in which, from divers points of view, the perennial significance of this creative experience shall be enshrined. Thus, in the Passover, the soul of the deliverance was distilled into an institution, which became a chief bond of the race, and a spring of spiritual education from age to age. And now in the text we have, in primitive form, the great law of spiritual obligation in its bearing on the children of God. As one can see, the spiritual lines of God's dealing with man under every economy are being

laid down, for the first time in the history of humanity, in this narrative, which, to every seeing eye, bears the image and superscription of the Most High.

During the last generation, it has become more and more apparent that the Old Testament contains, besides a history of the preparation for redemption, a most interesting history of the education of the human soul up from primitive to more developed moral conceptions. Thus, the conceptions of family and tribal responsibility seem to come first, and only in the times of the prophets, a full, clear, perfectly-rounded doctrine of personal responsibility is attained. In our text, however, we have a first step in the history of the education of the human spirit on higher grounds. It is one thing for the individual soul to recognise an authority entitled to say, 'Thou shalt,' 'Thou shalt not,' and to yield obedience; and it is another and higher thing truly to respond to a great deliverance by a sacrifice of affection. And this was the nature of the act, which God was drawing forth by the ordinance regarding the first-born. We have here the actual historical dawn of the principle, which becomes supreme in the New Testament,—the principle of free, loving, evangelical obedience. Because God delivered their first-born when those of the Egyptians were slain, therefore they were to sacrifice to the Lord all that opened the matrix, being males. It was a command with all the sacredness of a command, but yet even more an ordinance, creating an occasion and channel for displaying the thankfulness of their hearts.

Looking, then, upon this as the germ of a great Biblical principle, unfolding through the ages, we find in the text three important lines of instruction.

I. The law of obligation following upon deliverance.

II. The permissible modification of this law.

III. The equivalent for a personal discharge of obligation.

I. The law of obligation following upon deliverance.

In a word, it was this: whatever was saved from death by divine goodness, belonged to God. Of course we have not this stated in so many words. When we are teaching children, we put our principles into concrete instances. And so, on the very day of the Exodus, pointing to the destruction of the Egyptian first-born, God says: 'These first-born of yours, which I sanctified to Myself and so preserved, are Mine; sanctify them to Mè. They must be looked upon as holy to the Lord, entirely set apart to His service.'

Might we pause from our main theme to say, that here we have a magnificent example, of how the full influence of a historic event may be carried down into every home, and perpetuated through every generation? We have had our great deliverances—no nation has had greater; but we lack this happy secret of vivid perpetuation. Our young people are growing up ignorant of our history, indifferent to the great principles around which controversy for centuries has raged. But within every Hebrew house, and in that holy, ecstatic hour, when through the gates of peril and fear the first-born child came forth, the great memory of the death-angel's flight, and of Israel safe behind the sprinkled blood, would rise up as from the dead. In the light of their own flaming affection, father and mother, clasping their treasure, would apprehend the agony of that trial, the joy, the gratitude to God which rose up in their forefathers' hearts, on account of that crowning and creative deliverance.

Their oneness with the victors in that dread birth-struggle of their nation, would flood their being with a widening, purifying current of national pride. For was not this little babe of theirs the sacred property of God, because of His great mercy in Israel's hour of peril?

And so, house to house and man to man, the Hebrews were knit to the past and to God. At Sinai, during the forty years' wandering in the wilderness, in the first bright period of victory, while part after part of the promised land was passing into their hands, on through the centuries of backsliding and revival, to the early blossoming of promise in David's reign, thousands of times in every generation, that experience was renewed. Even amid the gathering darkness of the period preluding the Exile, and during the trying and changeful centuries to the coming of Christ, the fountains of holy memory flowed afresh at the birth of every first-born son, and with the roused emotions of parenthood there blended a new devotion and self-committal to the cause and hopes of Zion.

But profounder than this permanent influence binding Israel to the past, were the germs of spiritual principle which, developing with the development of Israel, educated them for their future. At first, under the tremendous impression of that judgment and deliverance, the dedication to God of their first-born was simply felt to be the most natural expression possible of the love that was in their hearts. Their sons had been delivered from death by the strong shielding arm of God: what less could they do than to consecrate them to Him? That is always God's way. He met us low down on the plane of our immediate need, and by a wonderful satisfaction of

that need, woke our gratitude. But if He begins with the necessity of the moment, He does not leave us there. Presently, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, through dire experience of the desert, and under the brows of Sinai, they woke up to the consciousness of sin, and found that even for them, there was approach to God only through shed blood. Marked by the sprinkling of blood, they themselves at Sinai came into covenant with Him. Now, what did that mean? They were being educated in that fundamental education for all men—their relations to the living God. They were being discovered to themselves, in those great experiences which brought them near to God. They now saw that they, the whole of them, could only stand before God on the ground of sacrifice sprinkled with atoning blood. Then rose up, as we have said, into clear consciousness, the shadow of sin. One can hear, mayhap, the first expression of that feeling which has since become the ineradicable experience of humanity, in those wondering, awe-struck words of Moses, ‘Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee.’

Here is the first amplification of the principle contained in the ordinance regarding the first-born. Because of this sense of estrangement, because of this growing consciousness of demerit and perversity before God; and above all, because, despite this, God was pleased to take them of His great mercy into covenant with Himself, and to provide for their approaching Him through ordinances and sacrifices; therefore they were His people, bound to submission and service: as we read in Exodus xix., ‘Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me, a kingdom of priests—a holy nation.’

This position once fixed, all through the Jewish centuries they were being educated as to what this dedication involved; not only ritual obedience, but moral conformity, and heart-oneness, and faith, and whole-souled devotion to God and His cause. Every psalmist and seer and prophet, added something to fill in that conception of full personal consecration due from Israel to His God. At last Christ came; and amid all the changes which He wrought, there was no change in this matter of our devotion to God, or, if a change, only in the direction of heightening the standard of personal surrender. 'Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.' We hear Him say, 'He that loveth father and mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me.' Yea, stranger still, He tells us that unless we are prepared to hate our lives we cannot be His disciples.

The meaning and reasonableness of such language are revealed in His cross. There we learn that from far worse than temporal death, from the soul ruin, the eternal, irremediable loss which flows and must flow from a state of sin against God, we are delivered by the sacrifice of Christ. From bondage immeasurable, unending, we are freed by a sacrifice infinite in the descent, infinite in the height of its love. And so by an obligation, the magnitude of which we cannot compute, we are committed to the total dedication of our beings to the will of Christ. 'We are not our own, we are bought with a price, that we may glorify God in our bodies and spirits, which are His.'

Yea, there is one further point necessary to the full understanding of this conception. In the covenant of grace, our obligations are so immeasurably above

any consecration which we can command that we might well be depressed and paralysed by our failure to attain. But in that very covenant of grace, God has raised the capacities of our humanity, by the promises of His word and the potencies of His Spirit. Weak in ourselves, we may be strengthened in all might by His Spirit in the inner man. And our responsibility extends to the full use of all the resources of grace, so that Christ may have a rich revenue from all His gifts in our sacrifice and service.

Here, then, we have the full blossoming of that principle, at the beginning incarnated in the ordinance of the first-born. Whatever is saved from death by the divine goodness belongs to God, is a thing dedicated, consecrated to the divine service. In its lowly origin that principle has so primary a reference to physical life, that with the first-born of man, was coupled the first-born of beasts. But how far we have now travelled; and, through the divine discipline of the ages, how full and rich has the conception become, on the one hand of the divine deliverance, on the other of the consecration which it demands!

In this most enlarged significance, as the recipients of the divine redemption, we are bound to such a surrender. In the fullest sense which the words can bear, we belong to God. In virtue of rights over us, which, for depth and range, leave all human rights in the realm of shadows, God has an absolute proprietorship in us,—our lives, our energies, our talents, our opportunities, our influence—all are His. It is for Him to dispose our lot, choose our sphere, employ our activities, command our service. His right so environs us that we have no interest outside, can have no lawful ambition beyond the circle of duty. Even

the ultimate boon of life, which to throw away at our own hand is the sin of sins, must not be held back if God demands the sacrifice.

These are the inherent and essential obligations of our saved state, springing out of our position as redeemed. Ours it must ever be to live in the constant realisation of them. In every prayer, in every plan formed as to our future, in the disposition of our time, in the division of our substance, in the formation of our friendships, in the use of our influence, this conviction of God's proprietorship in us should be the determining element. To live in disregard of that conviction, is to be untrue to the most distinctly Christian feeling of our hearts, to live far below the true platform of character and service, to introduce an element of falsehood and unreality into the inmost citadel of faith. Doubt not but that this dishonesty will work to a real retribution, by making the Christianity, which you will not allow to control your conduct, seem trivial and unreal when you most require its aid. 'Be not deceived ; God is not mocked ; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.'

This is a history of spiritual beginnings. From the earliest expression in statute, we have traced the growth of the great spiritual principle of free evangelical obedience to apostolic fulness. We now travel back to the primitive ordinance of our text, in order to grasp another important law of the divine action—the law of particular devolution of specific duties to persons and classes, in perfect consistency with the obligations and privileges of a common religious responsibility.

We shall discover this by asking—

II. What are the permissible modifications of this law of obligation? Revelation is not a slave of the letter, but a living spirit, always consistent with itself, moving on to one foreseen goal, but, like all living things, capable of change and expansion, assuming varied forms in the expression of its unvarying, essential aim. Of this we have a most remarkable example in the history of the precept, first laid down in our text. At verse 2 we read, 'Sanctify unto me all the first-born, whatsoever openeth the womb.' But further on in the same covenant-history, we read (Num. viii. 5, 6, 16, 17), 'take the Levites from the children of Israel and cleanse them. Even instead of all the first-born of the children of Israel, have I taken them unto Me.'

Now here we seem to have a specific change in the purpose of God. Whereas, in the first institution recorded in our text, He ordained that all the first-born should be consecrated to His service, in the book of Numbers He expressly enjoins that the ritual service of the tabernacle, instead of being carried on directly by the first-born, was to be assigned to a single tribe, that of Levi. In all this, however, there is no real contradiction. It is unnecessary to resort to the hypothesis of conflicting documents. We have here a most instructive history, of the regular and harmonious development, of two related principles. God is paving the way for the setting up in Israel of specific institutions. Long before His people, however, are ripe for these, He lays down the general law of responsibility on which these were based. Because they have received their first-born delivered from death, therefore are they bound to

dedicate them to Him. This is the general principle of obligation, broadly stated so as to awaken a response in every Jewish heart.' But from the beginning, in the provision made for redeeming not only animals but man (see verse 13), there were hints of possible new developments, and then, in the further injunction regarding Levi, God laid down, beside the general principle of common family responsibility, the further principle of the devolution of specific office to a particular class or order.

Now upon reflection, this gradual progress toward specific institution, will be seen to be a provision of far-reaching import and piercing spiritual discernment. It made all service to rest on obligation, thus killing the conceptions of merit and of task-work, and substituting the perfectly original spirit, of a loving response to infinite grace. It united priest and people by one common bond of loving duty. The sons of Levi, in taking up the service of the first-born, did not absolve them from, but witnessed to, their personal responsibility. And while thus the hold of God was strengthened upon all the families of His people, through the principle of devolution there was room for the more specific culture of a particular class. When specific service is continued in one particular line, talent is developed, and character is moulded far more perfectly in that direction; lofty traditions are formed and sanctities are cherished, which create an atmosphere peculiarly fitted for that service.

Can we fail to see in these outlines of provision the first blossomings of principles which were to govern the kingdom of God throughout its whole history? Yea, do we not discern in the mode as

well as in the matter of them, the movement of a self-conscious spirit, who foresees and takes account of the end in these rudimentary beginnings? Though we are at a more primitive stage of the kingdom of God, we cannot allow the idea of a lower, less pure inspiration, presumably tolerant of admixtures of myth and illusion. As respects insight into spiritual law, we are on the highest levels of revelation. These adumbrations of ritual ordinances reveal a grasp of principle, which we can only fully appreciate when we have come into the full sight of New Testament times. Then, as we saw under the former head, the conception of obligation had widened. Not only over the first-born, but over all had God an absolute proprietorship, because all His people are delivered from death through His Son. On this experience of redemption, individual and yet common, rests the common Christian obligation to serve. Of all the redeemed, whatever their diversities of position, ability, character, this common fact is true, that they are not their own, and that they live to glorify Christ.

Still, in the New Testament as in the Old, there is room for the principle of devolution. Within the larger circuit of Christian activity, God, as ruler in His own house, has specific tasks to which He calls whom He wills. For instance, there is the special work of preaching the Gospel in the power of His Spirit, and the administration of His church. True, the obligation binding those thus called to this work, is, in the main, not to be distinguished from that common Christian obligation, to give to God the life which He has delivered. They are only servants, to whom God has assigned this task, for His people's profit and His own glory. Still, in the new economy as in the old,

devolution has its value. God's servants need culture as well as grace for these high tasks. He, who commanded His disciples to gather up the fragments of the miraculous feasts, would be eager to conserve, for the use of succeeding generations, all the plans of sanctified wisdom, the conclusions of pious experience, treasured up in the life and formulated in the rules of a specific continuous organisation, called to particular work and burdened with peculiar responsibility. Separated from ordinary avocations and cares by express call, set apart to communion with God through His Word and Spirit, they are fitted, or rather we should say it is incumbent on them, to be an advanced guard in the kingdom of grace, on the sides of principle, and of personal conduct, and of practical application to daily duty, flashing in the mind of Christ on their day and generation, and so conserving the progress of the whole.

But there is another side of these related principles, of great practical value. Outside those specifically set apart for the subjugation of the world to Christ (we mean as their exclusive business and calling), there is a vast host of Christian men. Of course they are under the common obligation, to give their lives for Him who died for them, and because of this, as opportunity offers, they must work and witness. Yet regarding them all this is true,—and they constitute the great bulk of the Kingdom,—they are called to work outside the spiritual, and only indirectly affecting its progress. It is theirs to direct the councils of nations, to administer national and municipal affairs, to cultivate the ground, to distribute the products of widely sundered climes, to educate the masses, to diffuse and organise opinion. According

to the religious view of life, this is by ordering of God, and they must discharge their duties as unto Him. And in all these varied spheres, Christian men may render notable service to the Kingdom of Christ. If they were not to be found in all these spheres, exhibiting the principles of a Christian morality, and breathing through them a humanitarian spirit, the world would be immeasurably worse than it is. Still, when we remember that we have all equally been saved by divine grace, and that we are equally bound by the bonds of surrender to Christ, it might appear a hardship for the many to be set to material tasks, which have only a reference to the transitory work of time, while the comparatively few are associated with Christ, in work calling forth the energies of the Holy Ghost, and having eternal ends.

But here comes in the principle of devolution. If direct responsibility for exclusively spiritual work devolves on some, equally direct responsibility for maintaining the whole work of the kingdom devolves on the mass. Nothing can alter or abridge Christ's right over you. You are His, and if you are called to secular work, you must recognise that right by putting into the field an equivalent for personal service.

The Israelite father had to redeem his boy, and if Christ in the new covenant does not put a price on your head, it is because His is the law of liberty. But of that we are presently to speak. What we would insist on now, however, is that this is a divine arrangement, that none of His people may suffer hardship, or be relegated to an inferior place in the Kingdom.

Men who, by their activity in worldly work, have achieved great fortunes, or have risen to high place,

may smile at the idea of their being in an unfortunate position, as compared with the servants of Christ. But when the world shall be wrapped in flame, and, reduced to what we are in the qualities of our spirits, we stand to be judged by Him who is a Spirit, we might well complain, if we found ourselves reduced to a lower caste, through our having been relegated to the material work of time. But we recover our birthright, so to speak, and all of us are lifted to the one plane, by that double principle of devolution. Our terrene ministries are consecrated to Christ, through their spirit being the spirit of Christ, through their fruits being dedicated to Christ, through the contribution of gift and service we make to the triumph of the Cross.

Does not this put in a new light this matter of contribution to the service of Christ? What you owe to Christ is yourself, and this is your way of directly expressing your obligation. You in effect say, 'I owe my life, and would give it for the advancement of His kingdom; but, since my work, by ordering of God, lies elsewhither, this is in lieu of my life as a direct contribution to His cause.' And in your gift, you take rank with the spiritual forces of humanity, psalmists and prophets, apostles and missionaries, preachers and teachers of Christ.

III. The equivalent for a personal discharge of obligation. On the day preceding the Exodus, God said, 'Sanctify unto Me all the first-born.' The seed-corn of the idea of obligation was planted then. And so we have spoken of it, as operative in moral effect, right through from that time. But only when they got settled in the land could the principle of equivalence be worked out in details. When you are living

on manna from heaven, you cannot make offerings of what you do not possess. God never expects impossibilities. Yet He puts down here what they were to do when they got into the land, that the principles of His action might be before them, just as for centuries the command, 'Go ye into all the world' stared out upon generations who had neither power nor opportunity to fulfil them.

But let us travel forward and realise the principles involved. First, you see God put, in a common category, the first-born of man and of cattle,—family and possessions. What you are before God is all that you are, your personality, the family you control, the lower creation your possession. If you are God's, your children are God's, your possessions are God's, all you have and are belongs to Him.

You remember we looked upon this dedication of the first-born as but the dawn of the great principle of obligation, which grew to wider proportions as the ages of the Kingdom rolled on. Not only are your first-born but you yourselves are His. And if you be His, so are your possessions. How is the use of your worldly goods to be consecrated—how are they to cease being a snare, to become a minister to the nurture of the higher life? By their being redeemed through a portion being set apart to the service of Christ.

In verse 13 we find a very strange provision, which seems utterly remote from anything in modern experience, but which will be found not without some analogy in our times. Animals then were divided into clean and unclean—a ceremonial difference, the reason for which we shall not wait to consider. The unclean could not be directly offered to God. And

so they had to be exchanged for clean, an ass for a lamb, or the unclean had to be killed. Now under the Gospel all artificial categories of clean and unclean are done away. Everything is clean and capable of subserving the advancement of God's Kingdom, which is not unclean by the pollution of sin. And as to that, seeing that we are committed to the renunciation of whatever is unclean, there can be no question as to its use in our offerings to God.

According to later enactment, the redemption price of a first-born child was five shekels. That, to use a phrase in 2 Kings, was the money of his estimation, and it was cast into the treasury of the Lord. But the phrase was still more pregnant—the money of the souls of his estimation, *i.e.* the money of the souls for which he had to estimate or pay an equivalent. What, then, of those who make no offering either for their children or themselves? Have they no share in Christ, no interest which prompts them to give an equivalent for personal service? When you next contribute say, 'This which I give is what I consider a fair equivalent for the personal service which, in other circumstances, I and mine might have rendered to Christ.'

How different would be the giving of thousands in the Church of Christ if these principles had sway! May God write them upon our hearts. And may we be more eager to vindicate our oneness with Christ and His saints by the greatness of our sacrifices in His service, than to build large fortunes or achieve high renown! Redeem the time, seeing that the days are evil!

XIV

THE DESERT JOURNEY

EXODUS xiii. 17-22.

TO us this narrative is no semi-legendary history, nor yet a mere transmigration of a people from one land to another—but something immeasurably more important, a step forward in the history of the Kingdom of God. We are exploring the historic origins of that divine kingdom, which to-day fills the world; in which the living God is still revealed to men, coming into their lives by His Word and Spirit; within which an increasing number from every shore, are experiencing the divine presence in conviction, renewal, and life, through the power of the Holy Ghost, and from which an innumerable host have already entered the courts of eternity.

In the first rooting, then, of a Kingdom so unique and so sublime, for the erection of which earth is but a stage, we may expect events beyond the common order, and a peculiar presence and over-rule of God. If this history could be confined within ordinary human limits, and brought down to an objective natural plane, it would thereby be shown to have no relation to that kingdom, the pivots of whose entrance-gates are the supreme revealing miracles of the incarnation and the resurrection, and where everything is accomplished, whether of

individual progress or public service, through the inworking of divine power, and the abiding of the divine presence.

We do not object, then, to the presence of the extraordinary, or even of the miraculous, in such a narrative. Yea, we have created in our minds a profound impression of the reality of the narrative, because of the subtle and detailed correspondence between these exceptional providences and material miracles, and permanent spiritual laws of divine dealing in the kingdom of grace. If only an artist can arbitrate in fundamental questions of art, if only within a system, and from a standpoint of sympathy with it, can you rightly judge a great edifice of philosophic thought, so only from within the kingdom of God, and through living experience of its principles and laws, can we understand the history of its origin and growth.

In saying this, we do not withdraw from historic inquiry, or shelter from the severest criticism, the narrative of the Exodus. These were deeds done on this stage of time, to be dealt with as other facts are dealt with, by laws of historic science. But part of the fact is the bearing of these events on the whole future of the Kingdom, their unique pregnancy and educative power as factors in human progress; and a historic treatment that excludes this creative element, or gives it an inadequate representation, stands convicted of anti-religious prejudice—as little worthy of respect as any other kind of prejudice. We have been far too timid and deferential, to a spirit as hostile to the realities of the redeemed experience to-day, as it is to the verities of the patriarchal testimony.

The stroke of doom fallen, at last the children of Israel are in motion. Having entered this land some four hundred years before a family, they are leaving it a nation. The whole mass of the people, especially if you include the mixed multitude, could not be under two millions. From beside the great pyramids, northwards to the lakes or lagoons skirting the Mediterranean, the black land would be dotted over by families moving in converging lines to some rallying centre in the land of Rameses or Goshen. Hence they marched to Thukut or Succoth, a region not far from the modern town of Ismailia. From this they could have marched by a well-known track right into Palestine. It was a historic route over which armies had come and gone for centuries. Moses himself may in earlier years have travelled that way, in the train of the conquering Rameses. Had they taken that course, in a comparatively short time they would have reached the promised land.

In spiritual matters, however, a straight line is not the shortest distance between two points. As remains to be seen, God has many things in His thought, which could not now be discovered to them, but which had all to be carried through, ere they could fitly reach their journey's end. One point at least is obvious. If they went up at once into Palestine, they would straightway be involved in war with masterful Philistines and Canaanites. And so God commands them to turn south. He has all eventualities in clear vision, foresees all possible dangers, takes up all the circumstances of His people into His clear, unwavering thought, and so orders their way.

‘With peaceful mind the race of duty run,
God nothing does, nor suffers to be done,
But what thou wouldst thyself, if thou couldst see
Through all events of things as well as He.’

God’s way, however, appeared very strange. It meant that they should turn their backs on the goal of their desires, that they should with every forward step put a wider barrier of distance between themselves and rest. And, sadder still, no longer was the free desert before them. As they journeyed from Succoth to Etham, the long line of the bitter lakes cut off their retreat eastward. Mountains also rose before them to the south—in that direction barring their only progress. They are marching into a *cul-de-sac*, from which if they are pursued there can be no escape. Then the Lord commands them to turn round, or, as the Revised Version has it, back ‘and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal-zephon.’

The sites of this memorable journey are hardly any of them fixed beyond dispute, but yet, despite destructive criticism, the direction and the main features of the route are agreed upon. Most probably at that time the Red Sea ran in a northerly direction far beyond Suez, so as to include the bitter lakes and Lake Timsah, and at some point, whether at Suez itself, or at one or other of two suggested more northerly routes, the great crossing was made. Without maps, and having respect to our limits and practical aims, it would avail nothing to discuss these antiquarian details. Let us turn rather to the moral and spiritual features of the scene, to the critical stages in this march of faith.

And let us remember that this great march does

not stand alone in the history of the world. In this movement forward in obedience to God's word, the kingdom of Jehovah appeared in historic reality among the kingdoms of earth. And in similar acts of faith and total surrender, the Church has gone forward age by age. To the unbelieving reason those creative epochs, in which God comes down into fellowship with men, and lifts them up as in great tidal waves of character and influence, through them to bless the world, are more or less stumbling-blocks. They do not square with their self-centred view of the universe. They do not fit in to a limited scheme of purely natural law. And so they have to be explained away; and this truncated reason has shown a perverse and often pitiable ingenuity, in accounting for the spiritual birth-times of humanity, and for (what has seemed to it) this strange disease of religion in man.

When carefully examined, however, not only have these great movements an inherent reasonableness and verisimilitude, but we find them so intertwined with the histories of men, both in their origin and effects, and having roots going so far back into the centuries, that to open and reverent minds doubt is more difficult than belief. In connection with this movement, notice one small circumstance which crops up at this time with vast suggestiveness. Among the millions of living, hurrying over the yellow sands, there is one dead man. They bear the dry and withered remains reverently in the centre of the host. That body is a sacred trust, guarded by their nation for wellnigh four hundred years. It is the body of one who, in his boyhood, lived in the promised land, to which they are returning,—the son

of Jacob—the great-grandson of Abraham. And though Egypt heaped on him her honours, gave him a princess to wife, an almost royal position, and all the reality of royal rule, he remained true to his country and to his country's God. When the shadows of time were gathering, and the forces of life were ebbing away, he realised so vividly and believed so entirely the great promises to his fathers, that he sent for his brethren, to bind them by a solemn oath that they would, in the time of their own return, convey his remains back to the promised land.

It is a sublime scene,—to pass for a moment forward into that still earlier time,—the proud palace, the grand vizier, versed in imperial concerns and bowed with imperial burdens, lying near to death on his bed of state, his humble brethren standing around him. No anxiety of administration ruffles his soul. The concerns of his nearer, and, as men thought, his sublimer past, have vanished from his remembrance. He is back in his boyhood's days. The promises of God to his fathers, are as vivid and as enchaining in their grasp as they had ever been. He believes them with as entire a faith. Intercourse with heathenism has not dulled, experience of the world has not undermined his faith. The oath of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob stands: 'He will surely visit you and bring you up out of this land unto the land of which He sware.' 'And now,' he cries, 'I will take an oath of you that you shall carry up my bones.'

Four hundred years had passed away since then, and, amid all persecution and vicissitude, they had been true to their trust. How that sacred treasure would keep alive in them the memory of Joseph's faith! He had not renounced—nothing earthly would

have made him renounce—this hope. Here is his dust waiting to be borne back. Doubt would die, despair would sink abashed, before the material sign of so sublime a faith. That dead body, committed to them for burial in the promised land, had been a living voice from God, through all those silent and weary years. And now that they bore it through the desert, being dead, it spoke of the true nature of this great experience. Here was the confirmation of Joseph's faith, the fulfilment of the promises in which he had believed. Looking on his dust, they seemed to touch the very dawn of God's dealings with their race, and were carried forward to their entrance into the promised land.

A great movement like this, with its roots in the furthest past, and slowly reached through centuries of preparation, has a reality about it, a self-evidencing verisimilitude, convincing in the highest degree. And so when we hear in our own day, men saying, 'Why believe in a God who spoke only to Jews? Is He not speaking everywhere and at all times, to all men who will receive Him? Why confine yourself to one incarnation of God in a solitary individual some eighteen centuries ago. Is He not incarnating Himself in all who yield themselves to His sway? Throw away the letter, and believe in a universal religion of spirit.' We would say, when such things are affirmed, 'My brother, you think that you are making belief in the spiritual easy, but you are making it immensely more difficult.' It is a great thing for any man to say, 'God has spoken to me.' We must not confound, with that verity, fancies and visions of our own. There is a light easy way of speaking about inspiration and revelation, when men mean nothing more

than the rarer ideas, the more sublimated and volatilised perceptions of their own minds. But in the Bible sense, God's speaking to us means immensely more than that. It means an experience totally beyond man's power to produce: God coming down into our lives as their dominant force, our lives escaping into a higher liberty, through hourly submission to His revealed will.

Now by whomsoever it has been received, this experience is so intensely real, so revealing and so life-giving, that even if God had spoken to no other being in all the ages, that man could not but believe it true for him. No man who has heard and responded to God's voice, can stand in permanent doubt of the fact. Yet in that case the very grandeur of the experience raises a difficulty. Why should God in all the ages have spoken exclusively to me? Ah, we cannot find intellectual rest, till, in the individual act, we see the God-like purpose, the vast, far-reaching plan, self-evidently worthy of a divine mind, and in which the divine perfections are revealed! Fragmentary and episodical divine relations, merely to individuals, repeated and re-repeated, without any historic revelation of a common purpose running through them all, could never carry beyond this intellectual doubt whether God has spoken at all, could never raise beyond the immediate experiences of the moment, and could never sufficiently distinguish what was of God in us, from the froth and trivial working of our own minds.

But when God's call and revelation of Himself to the individual, springs out of a revelation to the race, we rise above these difficulties. This speaking of God to us can be no dream, for through the same

words by which He has spoken to us, has He spoken to millions, who have believed as we believe, and lived as we live. And not only in the present day, but, as written records prove, there have been like results in past generations, up and up, to the very time of the record, and of the facts recorded therein. What a witness in human experience for the reality of that in which we believe! But that is only the vestibule to the sublime edifice of witness, in a historical revelation.

We have referred to the speaking power of that dead body as witnessing to Joseph's unquenched faith in the promises of God. But what is that solitary material witness to the spiritual and clustered witness of revelation! In revelation we have, not merely a dead sign, but, in living delineations, the faithful portraiture of saints and sages who risked everything on their faith; the immense effects of this faith on their own and after-times; the glorious fulfilments and confirmations which this faith received. And that is the least of it: here we have, in sublime unveiling, the great purpose of God in which these put their trust, slowly evolving through the ages, working itself into the life of successive generations in the various stages of its advancement, reaching out in every new advance to a fuller realisation of its essential aim, till at last in Christ the complete thought of God is unveiled. All idea of revelation being a dream vanishes from our minds. What is so rooted in the history of the world, what has made such vast contribution to the moral progress of the world, stands proved an incontestable reality. Our intellectual difficulty disappears. We enter into the fulness of God's thought in the entire scheme, see the general purpose of mercy under which He has dealt with us,

and behold therein God so glorified, the meaning of human existences unveiled, and the issues of the present so laid bare in a glorious future that the soul is rapt beyond itself in ecstasies of praise. Again in the full light of God's purpose we can correct the limited findings of our experience, and so advance step by step to fuller knowledge. And by the touchstone of God-given truth we can discover and separate our own unreal from His true.

Thus from a mere pinpoint of suggestion have we sought to exhibit the supporting, educating, corrective influence of a great historical revelation. It seemed to us that such a course of thought was of value for this time. Some are thinking that we could have God and all the blessings of religion, though the great factors of the divine unveiling were undermined. There could not be a greater mistake. While we stand upon a historic revelation entrenched in the life of the world, through millenniums of the history of humanity, and while we cling to a faith, uniting in a glorious whole the generations and centuries of mankind, and verified by their experience, rationalism may rage, but it cannot overthrow. But if all that you have to show for the spiritual and divine be your own surmisings and divinings, reason with its demonstration of uniform, continuous, material development will sweep you like a gossamer from its path.

But let us turn to another striking circumstance in this march of faith. They are following God's lead, going whither He guides, and so soon as they have struck the pathless desert, a pillar of cloud goes before, which at night flames above the sleeping camp, a towering mass, glowing as with fire. Here again we

have an exceptional and miraculous act, which commends itself as true, by subtle correspondence with elements in the present experience of the children and the Church of God. We suppose that there are many to whom this is nothing more than a pretty fancy which has captivated the imagination of men. They live out of direct relation to God. They are not conscious of God's guiding of their own lives, and so they cannot conceive how God should guide others.

But there are multitudes, to whom the closest personal guidance of God, is the real and blessed experience of each day. They have lost their wills to God, and live to please Him. To them life would have no meaning, if they could not absolutely place themselves in His hand, no joy unless they were conscious that their way was being ordered for them, no comfort or strength except in the absolute conviction that His way was best. To them this incident carries an inherent probability in its heart. If God was leading them on to the establishment of His kingdom, His will must have been supreme. And at the present stage, how could that have been better done than in some such way? This sign dominates the whole camp. Every eye has it in view. While it rests they rest ; with its first rising and movement forward they make ready to depart.

True, in one respect there is a great difference between God's way of dealing with Israel, and His dealing with us. He does not lead us mechanically to certainty by an outward and visible leading. But the Israelites were in spiritual infancy still. Their only direct bond with God was His promise of a material deliverance, and their trust in that promise. They were, so to speak, in the physical stage still.

But they are on the way to moral discipline. By-and-bye what will most engross their souls will be, not the great cloud hovering over the camp, but that Shekinah cloud of God's holy presence within the veil. While still needing outward and material guidance, they will be hungering more for moral and spiritual conformity, with that holy One who hedges Himself off in awful majesty, and who will only be approached through priestly mediation and atoning blood. Later on, in the times of the prophets, even that deep thought, not merely of outward conformity in the walk, but of holy oneness in the act, will give place to one deeper still. God began through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, to speak of getting behind the mere will and its deeds, by means of a new creation, in which the very spirit of man would be changed into the mind of God. 'A new heart will I give you—a new spirit will I put within you.' 'No longer shall you walk in My way because of an external monitor like the cloud; the new nature within you will prompt you in the liberty of sonship; and by My spirit, whom I will make the dominant force of your life, shall I cause you to reach out to my commandments.'

Here, then, we have a manifest progress in revelation, and the beginning is unmistakably in this outward and visible leading spoken of in the text. But though we have come to a far deeper guiding, through the oneness of our renewed natures with God, and through the Holy Spirit applying the truths of His revelation to our hearts, yet we have much to learn from the simpler type. From this pillar of cloud we learn that though God leads us by His Spirit, through our judgment and the use of all the faculties which

He has given us, yet does He demand submission as absolute and entire, so that, even as if we were guided by an outward sign, we are entirely at His disposition and ordering. Then we see that the only true unity for creatures so weak as we, is through escape from self by this total subjection to His will. Only, when this unity is secured, not by an external order, but by God's will coming down into our surrendered will through the Holy Spirit, then this oneness of mind is consistent with the truest individual liberty, and with an infinite variety of means for securing the common end. And lastly, this type shadows forth the heart's-ease, the comfort, the joy, of absolute submission.

‘I have no cares, O blessed Lord !
For all my cares are Thine,
I live in triumph, Lord, for Thou
Hast made Thy triumphs mine.’

Here, then, we have the two great stays of a life of faith, and of a walk of faith, a record of divine promises on which to fall back, a living God to guide us each step of the way. Not the Word of God without His actual presence, nor His actual presence without the Word. These, in a very primitive and literal form, were the supports of Israel. These, but in a far more extensive, and rich, and spiritual form, are our supports ; the Word made the living message of God to us by the illumination of the eternal Spirit ; God, not dealing with us by magic, or through visitations overwhelming our individuality, but stooping to guide us through the free exercise of our faculties, and by application of the Scriptures of truth.

Most meet is it, in this day of doubt and debate, that we should realise our individual need of both

these stays. Make much of this living Word. Do not argue nor burden yourselves with passing controversies, but by diligent study and strong faith prove its power. It has the very comfort which you need for all the troubles and perplexities of the present. Cast yourself in expectancy on its divine testimonies. And as they reveal God's great will regarding the present, and all the wonders of unexhausted promise in the blessed sunrise of divine hope investing the universe, you will have the grandest demonstration of all—the demonstration of fact—that this book is Divine. And better still, revealed in His past acts, and in His as yet unrealised promises, God will stand forth as sublimely real to you as He was to Elijah or Isaiah or Paul—the one omnipotent factor in history reducing to insignificance all besides.

O for a race of Christian men, saturated with God's Word, dominated by the thought of God, and bound hand and foot to His perfect will! Then would we be in the way of new victories. What easy self-love, earthbound reason, and a self-sufficient egoism, impatient of limitation or restraint, have it not in them to accomplish, with all their boasted prophecies and scornful self-sufficiency, faith, and surrender, and whole-hearted following shall secure.

Not that we are to promise ourselves an early or a speedy victory. That is not God's way. No flesh must glory in His presence. Inspired by memories of promise, with the outward and visible sign of God's guiding, Israel was led away from the promised land, and into a blind alley from which retreat seemed impossible. How often have the protagonists of God found themselves in like case! The prophets, fired with an unquenchable faith in God, and

burning to see His promises fulfilled, seemed involved in the utter ruins of a tottering state and falling worship. Even our Divine Master, grasping the testimony of Scripture regarding Himself, and eager to fulfil the predicted purpose of God, found Himself baffled, and involved in what appeared to men the failure of His plans.

But, as we shall see, man's extremity is the opportunity of God. Through utter defeat, as it seemed, Jesus reached out to an eternal victory over death as over sin. The prophets who spake of Him, in the seeming defeat of every hope and overthrow of every foundation, soared through their unshaken faith in God's words up into the splendid visions of Messianic and millennial times. And if, as we shall see, the Israelites are carried into the jaws of ruin, it is that they may be rescued by a glorious exhibition of divine power. Remember! God is the great worker in His own kingdom; and in all reactions of evil, and decays of spiritual force, and uprisings of antagonist influences, He is preparing a situation, if we have only faith to believe, for His own infinite and resistless power.

XV

THE RED SEA CROSSING

EXODUS xiv. 5—xv. 22.

WE have come to one of the great dramatic events of history. In all those qualities that rouse the feelings and excite the imagination, it excels the highest ideal picture conceived by poetic genius, and stands alone among the epoch-making incidents and picturesque spectacles of time. Handel stretched his genius to the utmost, in the magnificent choruses by which he strove to realise the more striking features of the scene, only to create the impression that human genius was powerless to body forth such sublime realities.

The tendency is very strong to apply the footrule of ordinary terrene experience to such exceptional crises, and to deny them the merit of historical truth. But we deny the adequacy of such a standard. There are facts in the life of to-day, there is a presence of God in history, there are works of renewal and sanctification being carried on by God in human lives at this hour, there is a great world-wide divine kingdom being built up before men's eyes, which rationalism can no more explain than it can explain this past. When it honestly grapples with and can account for these facts before our eyes, we will begin

to attach some importance to its explanation of what went before. For this of which we are about to speak is no isolated marvel, coming, *apropos* of nothing, and leaving no trail of equivalent effect. This event is a great historic foundation of the kingdom of God, which is alive and at work, the mightiest factor in human civilisation even in this late age.

There may appear, to current modes of thought, difficulties in the way of accepting this incident. But they are as nothing to those in the way of its rejection. For, not to discuss many historical points which suggest themselves, how are you to account for the immense impression of such a mighty deliverance, which lived on in the nation for many centuries? The wonder and awe of this divine act are fresh in the minds of Micah and Habakkuk. The Psalms exult in the recollection of God's mighty power. Now among the things which cannot be manufactured is a historic consciousness—convictions, pulses of wonder, elements of awe which have entered into the soul of a people, expressing themselves in literature and life and escaping in all kinds of unstudied ways.

Then what of this song? Is this an imaginative reproduction of an imagined incident? We would have something like contempt for the critical faculty of the man who said so. We have in our older literature, a great number of ballads belonging to the time of storm and stress, of constant bickering and siege. And of these there have been a great number of modern imitations. But, almost without a single exception, these imitations have betrayed their recent origin. One felt instinctively, Here is a man not of action but reflection, who, sitting quietly in his study

has tried to realise a former time. But the actual singers of the old ballads were men immersed in that far-off troubled time, through whose souls there had swept the passions and anxieties of war; men possessed of the strong enthusiasms and weird imaginings of that earlier day, and who struck out, in ringing direct phrase, the moods of the moment or the real experiences of the hour.

And look at this poem. Do you not feel throbbing through it the overmastering inspiration of an overwhelming deliverance? Were there ever such pictures of sudden, resistless, all-encompassing destruction? 'Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea; his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea. The depths have covered them: they sank to the bottom as a stone.' Again, look at this picture of the lustful pride of the Egyptians, and then of their sudden discomfiture. But first take in the scene as it is painted with words of light: 'With the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.' Is not that the word-picture of one who saw the thing? 'Then the enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with Thy wind—the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.'

The consciousness of God is just such as we might expect in so dread an hour. 'The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is His name.' The triumph is His triumph, and all thought of man is obliterated in His presence. What could kindle such a sense of the divine but just such an event as is described? Then

what a clear, positive realisation of the actual situation! The singer, as if he were a great publicist, can reckon up the effects of this stroke. Fear and dread shall fall upon all the people around. 'By the greatness of Thine arm they shall be still as a stone,' Palestine sorrowing, dukes of Edom amazed, Moab trembling, Canaan melting away, till Jordan be crossed, and they are brought in to the mountain of God's inheritance—to His sanctuary. Who can deny that in all this we have an outflow of Israel's actual exultation, and a true picture of the prevailing mood around?

We turn to this story, then, feeling that there is firm ground beneath our feet, and that we are dealing with a historic fact. We did not presume to decide (on a former occasion) where Moses crossed; whether at Suez, or at some more northerly point to which the Red Sea then extended. But wherever we decide, the general features are the same. Southward the wilderness shuts them in, eastwards the sea. And now Pharaoh and his servants recover heart. He musters the flower of his army, six hundred chosen chariots, and sends them in pursuit. Following these are his main army. In no long time, as they lie in camp not far from the sea, the Israelites discern, far up the desert, dust-clouds marking the approach of this host.

Cannot you fancy the thrill—the terror—passing through the host, as over the horizon, like a broad immeasurable river, the long lines of armed men flow on? Remember they were but a herd of slaves, and this among the greatest armies of the world. They knew its prowess. They were familiar with the history of its recent achievements. From the Euphrates to the kingdom of the Upper Nile these

veterans of Rameses had made themselves feared. The Israelites have to learn, however, that the mightiest powers of earth have 'no power before the living God, and those in whom He puts His strength.

But that fact would have no influence till it was proved; and all the terror of the crisis, judged by ordinary standards, would break in devastating waves on their hearts. Realise the situation. They had faith; they could not have witnessed past deliverances, much less would they have responded to Moses' call and marched forth, if they had not had real faith. And when a soul has once thrown itself on God's word, and proved God's power, it makes a wonderful stand. Young faith, however, even where most genuine, is very limited, and must be taught the narrowness of these limits. More than that, the lesson must be driven home, that no trust can be placed in faith's own tenacity, but only in God.

So long as faith keeps looking out to God, it can ride the most tremendous storm. When Peter looked on the water his faith began to sink. And so Israel had looked upon these Egyptians till sheer terror mastered every other emotion. True, then they began to cry out unto the Lord, but it was a despairing cry of terror, not a calm exercise of trust. At this very moment, when their cries were so loud, they were touching the nadir of unfaith. There is a religiosity, blatant in its outcries, which is the negation of the living spirit of religion. Come and see how far a believer can fall when he has lost hold of God. He is the same coarse, repulsive, sinful man he ever was, destitute of divine help. Come, and for our practical learning let us discover how soon a nation may fall from the heights of heroic trust to a

hard, bitter, captious, unbelieving spirit, incapable of anything great.

Even after the Israelites had lost faith, they went on cringeing to God, but they took their revenge out on Moses. Ay, it is no easy thing to be a servant of God—to carry God's message with something of God's power to men! Oblivious of all the good which servants of God may have done them, many men, when they have lost faith or are made uncomfortable by the truth, will turn round on these servants and jeer, and taunt, and vilify. Remember what Moses did for these Israelites before Pharaoh, and in leading them out of captivity; and see how they could turn on him. Let me draw out at some length their bitter irony. 'So, what you have been wanting to do all this time was to kill us! What a round-about road you have taken! Surely there were plenty graves in Egypt where you might have buried us; nevertheless, in your perverseness, you must take us into the wilderness.'

We have heard speeches, we have read letters in the newspapers, in that very tone of scorn and contumely. But worse remained. What short memories some people have! How they can change their tune! Not so long ago these very Israelites were sighing by reason of their bondage. Not so very long ago Moses had lifted them out of the icy gulf of despair. The bare thought that God (as witness the message by His servant Moses), was looking on their affliction, moved them to adoring wonder and praise. And now these same people can turn round to their deliverer and say, 'Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?' To hear them, they are falling in love with their old slavery

again. They talk as if they were injured in being made the subjects of a magnificent divine deliverance. And worse still—look and see to what depths men can fall; they begin to quote some random cry of theirs at the beginning of their acquaintance with Moses, before they had been overwhelmed by the miraculous signs of God's presence. And as they quote, unbelief gives the cry a vicious twist. 'Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians?' Now, we are morally certain that they never said any such thing in Egypt, when their shoulders were tingling with the lash. In their despair they may have said, probably did say, 'Let us alone; there is no hope for us but to serve the Egyptians.' But now the false mouth of fear twists, as we have said, this cry of despair into a calm deliberate purpose. In other words, they put the whole blame on Moses—that heavily-burdened man—and speak as if they had been over-persuaded against their better judgments; 'And,' they add, with hard eyes looking in the face of their deliverer, 'it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians.'

Shakespeare makes King Lear say:

'Sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!'

Judge how sharp must have been the pain of Moses' heart, scourged by the ingratitude of a people. Shall he expose their ingratitude? Shall he vindicate his conduct? No! poor souls, they are beside themselves with fear; they are talking what, in other circumstances, they would see to be nonsense, and worse than nonsense. In loftiest magnanimity, he ignores the bearing of their words on himself. He puts himself in their place. He thinks how he may rally

their sinking courage. God's cause and theirs are dearer to him than his own. No man is worthy to be a servant of God who cannot sink self, who is not ready, though with wrung heart, to seek the good of those who are wrongfully entreating him in love to their souls and for the glory of God.

And if men only knew, the way of faith and self-oblivion is best. Had Moses in this crisis stopped to vindicate or avenge himself, he would have entrenched them in their fears. But he stood before them in the sublimity of unshaken faith, and with a great love in his heart that ignored their bitter carpings. Like a father soothing a fretful child, he cries, 'Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of God, which He will show you to-day.' The magnanimous tone moves them to shame, the heroism of faith rolls back the gloom of their fear. The very power of God is pulsing in this man's words, kindling their faith again. And when some sense of the might of God is now mantling in their hearts, he turns their eyes right on these masses of Egyptians blackening the yellow sand. 'Look at them,' he cries; 'ye see them to-day,—ye shall see them no more for ever.' Poor trembling hearts, how unnecessary had been their fear! They have been crying, 'How shall we cope with these?' But they will not have to cope with them. 'The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.'

Faith has a wonderful way of mounting from the depths of despair to the heights of heaven. Moses has succeeded far better than he dreamed. Evidently, when he had spoken, he turned to pray. But God sees His people strong again in the thought of His power. And so He arrests Moses in his prayer. 'Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the

children of Israel, that they go forward.' Ah, it is not in the hour of our strength that God can do aught by us, but in the hour of our weakness, when we have been led out of conscious nothingness to lean hard upon Him. The very men who, but an hour before, were the creatures of a craven terror, with nothing in their hearts but bitterness, and nothing on their tongues but stinging reproach, emptied of their poor selves, and yielded up to God, are getting into line for a heroic march of faith. God's way has always been—would that we could believe it!—to make the weak things of the world confound things that are mighty. Our extremity is His opportunity.

But, it may be, some one says, 'Can you believe that that great host of six hundred thousand armed men rose up and marched right forward to the sea.' To such an one we say, 'It is evident that you have never been in a great crisis of faith.' While these men looked on the Egyptians they lost courage; but when they looked right away to God, and rested on Him, and believed He was going to fight for them, they became like lions. It was in that faith—looking to God, thinking only of God—that they went on. He was going to fight for them, and He could open a way through the sea.

As the trusted and tried believer looks upon that seaward march, his eyes fill with tears. He does not think that this is so great or unprecedented a thing. Why, these men are only prototypes of countless hosts who have done the same. Faith's march is always to a sea of human impossibility, which it crosses by divine power. When Paul and Barnabas went down from Antioch to Seleucia, there stood in the way of their conquest of Europe a far mightier

barrier than a sea,—heathenism holding all her peoples in immemorial thrall, and entrenched behind the bulwarks of world-spanning Rome. But a way was opened up for them and their message right through the realm. When Luther went to Worms, he appeared to be marching into the very jaws of imperial and papal power. But a way was made for this servant of God to pass through. When Morrison, the pioneer of Chinese Missions, began his work, a man tauntingly said, ‘Do you really think that you will make any impression on the idolatry of this great empire?’ It was a shrewd thrust, for one man was trying to undermine the rooted paganism of three hundred millions. But Morrison marched on with the strong reply, ‘I expect God will.’ How inspiring these memories of trial and achievement! For if we are God’s servants, yielded up to His will, we are standing before seas of difficulty which no human power can cross. This godless temper of our time, this aggressive unbelief, this passion for pleasure, this thirst for riches—how these have swollen right before our eyes into a great resistless flood! To stand up before this flood, to go forward believing that it will yield to the old Gospel of Christ, needs strong faith. But let us not be cast down; take counsel, not of fear, but of faith. ‘Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.’

And now ensues another circumstance with profound spiritual analogies. ‘And the angel of God which went before the camp of Israel removed and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud went from before their face and stood behind them.’ When, yielded up to God, men are walking by faith, they enjoy a most wonderful presence and protection of

God. We have stories of our own Peden, when hunted by the dragoons, enveloped in protecting mists, on our own Scottish moors. Ay, and what cannot be pooh-poohed by the sciolism of our time, we have it written in the cool pages of secular history how, in Luther's days, the Empire and the Pope were hindered by one cause and another, having no relation to the Reformation, from resorting to armed force, until the movement was too strong to be stamped out. Read Christian history, read Christian biography, and see how God has shielded His own. 'O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.'

But let us look at the incidents of our story. When the command to advance was given, Moses had borne in upon him what was to be done. God forecast the issue, also, in the utter overthrow of the Egyptians. And now let us try to realise the scene. Remember there were at least two millions in the ranks of Israel, of all ages, from infancy to those of advanced years. It is nigh sun-down, when, having sighted the pursuing Egyptians, they get into line to march across. At that time, the incident just referred to occurred. The cloud which had been leading them went back and stood behind them, stretching as a black impenetrable mass between them and their foes. On the side next Israel, however, the cloud seemed aflame. Can you not see the lurid glare, the sea stretching dark and indefinite away, the moving masses silhouetted against the sand? Just then a mighty east wind began to blow. Two winters ago in Luxor we heard the explorer Naville tell how, on the lake of Geneva and elsewhere, strong winds in certain directions have been known to make profound

depressions in the waters. This was a wind of God, however, charged with a special mission, and like a great ploughshare it clove the Red Sea in twain, starting from the eastern shore, till right before the Israelites stood a swept pathway, and two mighty walls of water, one on either side.

What an eventful night, reminding them of that other so recently past, when the destroying angel smote the first-born! But here was an angel of salvation leading them on to liberty. How long the passage was we cannot tell; perhaps two or three miles. All night long the host would keep crossing; soldiers, women, children, cattle, showing the haste which they acted on that passover night. One wonders what the Egyptians thought, as they lay encamped on the other side of that impenetrable mist. Of course on the sand there would be no crashing noises as on stony streets. But through the impenetrable pall there would come signs of movement, the shouts of leaders, the lowing of disturbed and frightened cattle. At last the earliest grey of morning invades the night. The cloud has lifted, and lo! the Israelites, their journey wellnigh done, are disappearing through that wondrous avenue, whose flanking ornaments were water-cliffs, and whose way was the bed of the sea. What harnessing and leaping into chariots, what hoarse cries of command and hurried forming into line! We have no trace in the narrative of Pharaoh's going with them; but there went all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen. Still the great wind bellowed, still the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled, still the cliffs stood up on either side of the discovered sea-bottom, but even the latest Hebrew wayfarer was far across,

With precipitate step they dash on. Troop after troop sweeps into this strange defile. They never stop to ask themselves whether this is not a work of that terrible Hand which had so often smitten them, and of which they did well to stand in awe ; or, if the thought arose, their pride and thirst for victory sweep it from their minds. We confess to being greatly fascinated by the sight of these prancing hordes. In their pride, in their security of victory, they seem an emblem of those forces of human egoism which in every age are seen riding full-tilt against the cause of God, only to be overwhelmed. 'It came to pass in the morning watch, the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of cloud, and troubled them.' They felt they were not making progress. In the sinking sand the wheels rocked, loosened, threatened to fall away. Though their horses leaped vehemently their traces' length, the chariots hardly made way. And then, when it was too late, they began to think that this was of God. They saw their imminent peril. 'Let us flee from the face of Israel,' they cried. But they had dared God to the utmost ; they had contravened their own promise and command. 'Stretch out thy hand,' says God. 'And Moses stretched forth his hand, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared.' Ay, as the new day dawned, they, the representatives of an old order of force, were being whelmed in the flood, while the vanguard of the Kingdom of God stood safe on the sea-shore. Through the mounting waters they haste, but when the great fluid walls returned to the sea-bed, they swept over chariots and horsemen till not one remained !

When, safe on the farther shore, Israel saw the dead Egyptians thrown up by the yeasty waves, what thoughts must they have had, of their own foolish unbelief and of God's great power! When in our hour of extremity God arises for our help, how He makes us ashamed of ourselves! What poor thoughts we have had of Him, and how marvellously, again and again, He has outdistanced every hope and disappointed every fear! Trust Him, then, and not only for yourselves, but for the Kingdom. And trust Him even as Israel trusted. God is no whit punier in the nineteenth century after Christ, than He was in the thirteenth century before that event. He has not declined from the great work of former times. These wonders are, after all, only material symbols of a new order of forces dawning on the world, of a divine presence and power which God designed should be with His people, on spiritual conditions, and as an abiding experience, for evermore. We, if we are indeed the children of God, have crossed the hindering sea of human inability by divine power, passing from condemnation to pardon and peace. When all our strength failed, we have crossed over, by divine strength received, through faith to liberty. One day we shall cross over the Jordan of death to Paradise.

But we come back to the emblem of our world-conflict in this scene. There is one thing which the world cannot be brought to believe for any length of time on end—the reality of God's presence and intervention in the affairs of men. Time changes many things, but we have no change in this tendency except for the worse. There never was more brutal, God-ignoring, God-disowning egoism, than at this

hour, nor more of it among men. How wonderfully God has worked for His kingdom throughout this century! How wonderfully He is working now! And when was He more entirely dismissed from men's thoughts? Deliberately and on every side He is being put out of account. The wise will have it that there is nothing—nothing but law and force; what man can explain, what he can or will come to control. There is nothing sacred; no region which is not to be invaded by the intrusive hoof of human self-sufficiency. Human reason will dare and achieve everything which faith has done. How bravely for fifty years past these Bayards of rationalism have been riding on to vindicate that boast! But their wheels have been dragging. How much, or rather how little, it is in rationalism to achieve, has begun to appear. They have no hope for humanity beyond this earthly bourne. They have no morality which can at once educate and coerce the human will. They have no message to the higher nature. They have no bond between man and man. And here now, we verily believe by permission of God, are the great primitive passions of man, in the loosening of authority and belief, beginning to break in devouring waves on the world. The hunger for blood is growing in human hearts. Anarchists are plotting in the world's capitals. The forces of social unrest, like earthquake tremors, have been shaking the framework of republics as well as empires. The wildest revolutionary theories are possessing the minds of men. What can arrest these disintegrating forces, what can control and bend and shape the impulses behind them to order and progress? Only the word and power and passion of a living, dying, risen and reigning Christ. If He did

not intervene in a dissolved society, the folly and madness of modern rationalism would be written broad and large. Weighed in the balances, it is found utterly wanting, and only in a resurrection of the Spiritual and in a return to Christ is there other than ruin for this modern world.

XVI

MARAH AND ELIM

EXODUS xv. 22-27

IN the last exposition, we were raised to the heights of the moral sublime, in the study of that unexampled deliverance—the crossing of the Red Sea. Now we resume on the minor key. It is marvellous, how soon we can pass, from the heights of vision and enthusiasm, to the depths of despondency. Some readers might think that impossible, but then they leave out of their calculations poor human nature. We are not angels. We have souls, but we are not yet all soul. We have got bodies, many of us very frail bodies, and are ringed round by strict limits of necessity. And whilst we ought to be careful about setting up pleas of excuse on the score of bodily failing, yet a certain account has to be taken of this side of our beings, in judging regarding our spiritual developments.

The very intensity of the emotion, called forth by a remarkable deliverance, itself provokes a reaction. Human nature, exhausted with the great experience, betrays signs of fatigue, by dulness of feeling and torpid energy. Then, however sublime the season of triumph, it passes. Time flows on, bringing with

her revolving hours, the pressure of physical necessity, fresh duties and cares. Insensibly yet very rapidly, men find themselves drifting away under new horizons, into different moods, dictated by the experience of the passing moment. And the bulk of men are so entirely the creatures of the actual present, that they reflect the feelings to which the present gives birth. Within a short space from his wonderful victory over the priests of Baal, Elijah was, in despair, willing to die. The same diurnal round that witnessed Peter's intense assertion of devotion to Christ, saw his blasphemous repudiation and rejection. And let our own hearts bear witness to sudden revulsions, from devotion to worldliness, from loud professions of zeal to backsliding and transgression, that have flushed our faces and smitten our hearts with shame.

We suppose—with the majority of travellers and commentators—though there is another admissible view—that the first mustering-place of the Israelites was at Ayin Musa or Wells of Moses, seven miles or so from Suez. There they lay on the borders of two quarters of the globe, the African range of Ataka frowning on them from the west, the Asian desert stretching away to south and east. Remember, how untried the situation was, and how difficult were the movements of such a host. Egyptian captivity, if severe, yet secured a limited and strictly defined sphere of activity, and at night a familiar home. But now, broken from all moorings, they are moving out into the blank, inhospitable desert. They may have marched forth into that great wilderness of Shur, that lies east of Egypt, with confidence and hope. The very wasteness and dreariness of this

unpeopled tract of sand would intensify their joy, just as the reader's happiness has been intensified when he found himself far from city streets, with his foot on the heathery moor, and around him the hills of God. Here were they, free at last, escaped from the tyranny of a military despotism, loosed from killing and degrading servitude, delivered from the hireling's whip and the monarch's cruel decrees. The light airs of morning are fanning their brows, and the mounting sun sends forth tempered and genial rays.

This physical exhilaration, however, would soon pass. By noon the sun smote like a sword from the zenith, the sand was hot under foot, and all the yellow, shelterless expanse reflected, with cruel brilliance, the blinding rays. Think of the tired mothers, the fevered babes, the untamed impetuous boys. And still, through the long afternoon, the host moves on, till, just before darkness leaps upon them, unable to find a spring, they settle down on the waterless waste, and, refreshed by such scanty drops as can be distributed from the waterskins, they sleep till dawn. A second day is passed in similar conditions. A third day finds them, parched with thirst, and wearied with this unwonted marching, toiling on their way.

At last, as the third day sinks, in the golden splendours of afternoon, toward its welcome end, lo! in the distance, palms telling of water near. Is it not easy to realise the thrill of joy which passes through the camp? With what fresh enthusiasm they spur on, till the mouth of the Wadi Howara opens before their view, and they light upon the open well! How eagerly the pitcher is let into the

spring! And when the truth oozes out, that the water is brackish, bitter, and undrinkable, how profound the popular regret! The intensity of their joy had thrown them off their guard. They were so carried out of themselves, in an unthinking physical rapture, that when the stroke of disappointment fell, they burst out, like children, in tears and complaining, over their lost good.

We have been careful to realise the circumstances of this moral situation, that we may see the precise measure of Israel's offence. They did not murmur against God, they did not expressly, at least, doubt His faithfulness. They were as yet babes in the life of faith, unaccustomed to search into inner difficulties, and to draw inferences as to the action and character of God. This was a resistless animal cry for the quenching of thirst, and if they murmured they rose no higher than an angry conviction that Moses must have blundered. Surely he might have done better!

Excusable, however, though this, from a human point of view, may seem to be, it was none the less unfortunate. These people, in the highest and only adequate aspect of their position, had set out on a march of faith, to which God had called, in which God was to be leader and provider, and they were to be followers and recipients. Now, here was a break and rupture of that faith. Blazing with wrath at a material disappointment, they have lost, for the time, the last vestige of trust that this also might be from God. Be pleased to notice, dear reader, that wherever in any measure that spirit reigns, there is a severance of the bond that binds us to God. Without faith it is impossible to please Him, and if we

have not faith enough in God, in His goodness and wisdom, to believe that this trial or that difficulty may have come from Him, well, though we may assent to all the creed of Christendom, there is, nevertheless, a great gulf between God and us.

Poor anguish-smitten heart, think not that we have no pity, in turning you right away from your sufferings, whatever they may be, to God and to your personal relation to Him ! In this course alone can deliverance and victory be found. From the nursing of your trouble no possible good can come. 'That way madness lies,' for that way is no God. You must come back to faith. You must cease to believe, that there is only in your trial what appears to you. God may have meanings and purposes in these sufferings entirely undreamt of by you. And in the last resort are not you His, and has He not taken the burden of your life and way upon Himself? Trust Him, then. Tell Him, as much as you please, about your sorrows, and disappointments and fears. Even when your friends weary of your troubles, He will not weary ; for in all our afflictions He is afflicted. But tell Him also that you cast all your care upon Him. Say with Job, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.'

How fortunate it was that the Israelites had a friend,—and such a friend as Moses ! Cultivate acquaintance with experienced saints ; next to Christ and His Spirit, they may be your best helpers on earth. True, they that would have friends must show themselves friendly. And very often, by our false pride and conventional distinctions, which have no reason or worth in God's view, Christians cut themselves off from those who, above all others, are

fitted to render them assistance. There is a disregard of Christian fellowship prevalent in our time, which, closing us up in the narrow world of ourselves, leaves us blinder and poorer—less capable of perceiving the will of God, less able to perform it. Still more unfortunate, we herd with those on our own, or on lower, spiritual levels, and are exceeding prone to exhibit jealousy or suspicion, of those who are marked by a more uncompromising devotion, or live on a loftier plane. As every age of the Christian Church has witnessed, there is no blame too irrational, no accusation too wildly improbable, not to be urged, even with the most passionate hatred, against the men who, by their spiritual heroism and self-sacrifice, have made their generations their debtors. What lies were told of Paul! What foul calumnies have been launched at Luther! And how many Christians at this hour are keeping themselves at a distance from God's chosen servants, who are revealing most fully the Christ-spirit and laying the new foundation of His advancing kingdom, by carping at what they do not understand, by maligning aims into which they have not grace to enter, by blackening characters with which they are too worldly to sympathise.

In much the same spirit—though more excusably, as being mere infants in the school of faith—did the Israelites burst out into complaint of Moses. They murmured at him. They put the blame of their suffering on him. With their parched lips, they yet made out to cry, 'This is your doing, you have brought us into this case, and where now are you going to satisfy our thirst?'

Moses knew the injustice of their complaints, but

he put himself in their place, and asked himself how he might aid them in their distress. And now, see how deliverance came. Moses was a great man, one of the very greatest that ever lived. But he was also one of the very humblest. He did not rule in his own wisdom, or meet emergencies in his own strength. He had entered long since into that truth which reached its full expression in the great thought of Christ, 'He that becometh as a little child, the same is great in the kingdom of heaven.' He carried the matter to God. Would that, in the multiplicity of our organisations and with our far-reaching machinery, we kept this attitude. Well were it if our teachers, and committees, and boards of management, and sessions, and presbyteries, and synods, and supreme courts of every name, constantly and prayerfully realised that the Kingdom of God is a theocracy still, and can be administered on earth, only by surrendered souls, and through the light and power from heaven, which come into such souls, through the lowly wicket-gate of faith!

Moses cried unto Jehovah,—the covenant-God, the God who had said, 'I am come down to deliver them and to bring them out of that land unto a good land and a large, a land flowing with milk and honey.' Had they not gone forth, trusting in His promise, and would He not honour their faith? Getting down to our knees is often far more than half the battle. Moses would not have gone far in dealing with God, before his faith in God's deliverance, resting on such a promise, would have been as absolute as if he had known what the deliverance was to be. And so the answer of God was immediate and full, 'According to your faith so shall it be unto you.'

Burckhardt tells of a certain berry, growing in the neighbourhood, the juice of which improves brackish water. But whether this were a miracle, or a natural effect of a natural cause, we shall not curiously inquire. The sweetening of the water was an answer to prayer from God, and through the means of His appointment. It is well we do not know precisely what made Marah sweet. We would be for buying a cargo of the wood, instead of trusting in God. If there were infallible external specifics for sweetening the bitters of life, men would flee to them, as cripples in France flee to Lourdes. But every sufferer must come, expressly for himself, into contact with God, and by a distinctive exercise of faith secure the blessing. The great fact then is, that God heard prayer and sweetened the waters, and not the special means by which the thing was done. Come to God, each one for himself, carry to Him every trouble and care. He will give in each particular case an original, specific deliverance. 'Far, far above thy thought His counsel shall appear.'

And now we would call your special attention to a very important point in this passage. What is your general view of the bitters of life? How do you regard them? Are they simply untoward incidents, to be obviated by every means in your power, which, when they cannot be evaded, are to be proudly endured, and got rid of and forgotten at the earliest possible moment? Now let us be plain—if that be the position of any—and it is a very common position—then they are not, in the deepest sense of the word, believing men. What is it to be a believer? He is one who has put himself into the hand of Christ, and yielded up his will to Christ, because Christ under-

takes the whole task of his eternal salvation. He is a new creature, with a new motive power, in a new environment. Old things are passed away, all things have become new. And Christ is on the throne of the universe, that, as Mediator, He may overrule all things for the end of His kingdom. Nothing happens by chance. Providence is Christ's mechanism for proving and trying us. Special trials are ordained for particular disciplinary ends, and not merely to expose our weaknesses; but that from new and striking standpoints, we might see the fulness of resource and privilege that is ours in Christ.

It is in the fuller light of such New Testament thoughts that we can understand a wonderful word in this Old Testament narrative. 'There he made for them an ordinance and a right,' as one has translated, 'and there He proved them.' *There*—not only at Sinai, which lay concealed in the future,—but in this actual trouble through which they were passing. God impinges Himself upon men not only in 'thou shalt,' but in 'thou musts'; not only in positive legal commands, but in providential necessities. This trial was a thing appointed for them, something which they had to learn and pass through, as much as any ceremonial duty imposed afterwards by statute law. And it served its end by throwing the Israelites into a new furnace of judgment. In these fresh circumstances of trial, they would have to show how far their faith in God was to go. In a new agony of trouble, they had to face their own insufficiency. Then, over against their own insufficiency, there would shine out, in calm, convincing presentation, before the judgment of faith, God's all-sufficiency. And so they would come forth, from this further test,

with an enlarged sense at once of the duty of submission, and of the resources of divine power. The whole Marah experience was to be remembered as a memorable act of the divine dealing with them, of permanent worth, as a pattern of God's method in testing a human soul. All great saints keep in remembrance God's dealings with them, as revelations of His holy way, as proof of the gracious liberties and privileges which are theirs in Him.

No one will blame us for undervaluing positive statute and express revelation, yet we feel as if it were impossible to exalt too highly, as regards their epoch-making importance in individual experience, the ordinances of God in providence. Go back to the fountainhead of all that is most distinctive in your spiritual life, and you will find that well-head to be some Marah sweetened by divine power, in answer to the cry of faith. Some great sorrow, some crushing disappointment, seemed to annihilate life's joy—till in the trouble you saw that God had appointed you an ordinance,—a cross of the divine will to be borne, a command to be obeyed. How you entered into the depths of the divine judgment, as you went on in that way which God marked out for you to tread! What a new hold you got of God through His stooping to meet your need! Your whole Christian character, and every characteristic spiritual force within you, bear the stamp of that crisis, contain the particular pulse of vision and power, which you won in that conflict hour.

But we have to advance further before we can see all the meaning of Marah,—all the sweetening which comes from experience of pain. Not only does providence reveal as well as law; but when God makes

Himself known in a special providential dealing, He erects the truth contained in that dealing, into a great constitutive principle, which is seen in its own place to govern all God's dealings with His own. Take time to grasp what we have just said, for it contains an important truth. David passed through a terrible Marah of persecution at the hands of Saul. Once and again it appeared as if there were nothing for him but death. As he bowed to that will of God, seen in his persecution, he soared up to a stronger and more implicit trust in God. Every touch of bitter in his trial intensified his faith. And thus God made the testing of persecution, his training for kingship. What he won from sorrow became the very spring of his prowess and his triumphs.

And so God says in verse 26—if we may paraphrase the words—‘Keep alive in your thoughts what has passed here. It has more than a transitory significance. You fell into such terrible anxiety and fear, because in your fevered, parched condition you foolishly thought that all sorts of evil were to come on you. But you forgot Me. And so I have shown you still again, how I can and will deliver, when you put your trust in Me. Now grasp that two-sided fact, on the one hand of your own need, on the other of My all-sufficiency. Say to yourselves, that everything is to be of God's power through faith. Harken to My voice, not to your own fears. Ask, “What does Jehovah our God mean by this?” Then do what you know to be right in His holy view, and, so far as He has made known His will, take it,—in every variety of circumstance, take the course of faith and submission,—and as you have been lifted out of this trouble, so shall you be lifted out of all trouble. In the toils

of the desert, you shall not have the boils and blains, which troubled the Egyptians in the shelter and comfort of their homes. Safe under the shadow of My immediate guidance, you will enjoy a happy immunity from disease.' And so their one trial, overcome by faith, led on to a divine assurance of help and blessing covering their entire pilgrimage.

But there was one result of trial, overcome by faith, more blessed still. They had a new, in the sense of a more specific, revelation of God. Jehovah became Jehovah Ropheh, 'the Lord that healeth thee.' The crowning blessing of all intercourse with God, is the fresh unveiling of Himself in His every gracious dealing. By the light of His own acts, we see in wonderful self-revelation what He is, who is the Source and Life and Power of our lives. And, best of all, while so vivid, and searching, and far-reaching, in its illumination, that we are crushed before it, this self-revelation is so personal, and immediate, and comforting, that even in all His dazzling infinitude, God is a spring of life, and power, and blessedness, to our souls.

But let us descend from these heights to consider one of the religious puzzles of the hour. God called Himself, 'the Lord that healeth thee.' Does that mean that we are to cast off all use of means and seek what is called healing by faith? Why, in this very case, God used means. He showed Moses a tree. We are to lean as hard on God, when He uses material means, as if we expected Him to work a miracle on our behalf. Nor are we to regard ourselves as less favoured, because God heals us by the intermediacy of physicians and drugs, and not by swift, miraculous ministry. God has conferred unspeakable blessing in many directions, by ordinarily limiting His gifts to

the use of means. The necessities which He has thus imposed, have been the mother of invention. Compelling us to plough, and sow, and harrow, to harvest, and thresh, and grind, and bake, if we would have bread, to dig and mine, if we would have minerals, He has educated us in the arts of civilisation, in the act of giving us these boons. And so, by shutting us up in disease to the use of means, He has called forth all those vast, healing ministries, which have educated the intellects, the sympathies, and affections of millions, and woven bonds of love, between helper and helped, all over the world.

While being healed, however, the believer looks up to Jehovah, whose he is, and who has undertaken his whole case. The physician is but the instrument whom the Lord uses. And, if it please Him, He may transcend all instruments, and work in His own wonderful way.

‘Sweet are the uses of adversity’ says our great dramatist; and we have seen how blessed are the outcomes of sanctified trial. But we must not malign our Master, by making it appear as if the consecrated life were a life of trial. It is a life of joy! ‘Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.’ If for a small moment He forsakes us, with great mercy He gathers us! It was thirty-three miles from Ayin Musa to Marah. And this distance, with their great host of young, and feeble, and aged, took them the greater part of three days. Now, however, that they had learned the lesson of this trial, they were to have a surprise of mercy! After that, refreshed by the sweetened waters, they started from Marah to march south, they had not gone far,—probably not half-a-day’s journey, when, lo! before

them a larger expanse of feathery palm. It was the Wady Gharandel, then known as Elim. After the trials and anxieties of the past, God seems to say to them, 'Turn aside and rest a while.' And while the afternoon was yet young, they were defiling into that sheltered and watered vale. Burdens are unloosed, animals are unharnessed, tents are erected; and they take their ease, by springing well, and under welcome shade.

There is no word of any special thanksgiving to God on account of this welcome change in their fortunes. We take our blessings as a matter of course, and only murmur at our losses. Yet how much greater and more frequent are these than those. Marah was a transitory trial, but they encamped by the waters of Elim—evidently for some little time. How much we make of our slight and infrequent trials, and how little of the constant refreshments and blessings of the Christian state! And yet, what wells of salvation are ours! He giveth us to drink out of great depths. From the brimming wells of redeemed experience, in psalm, and prophecy, and personal history, we can still derive refreshment and stimulus. Then what quickening comes from the very ordinances of religion—prayer, preaching, the sacraments, from intercourse with believers, from heroic example, from present victories of faith! The sources of our invigoration are numberless, and life is happy, and fruitful, and bright, because of these. Yet we will go back to some old trial or disappointment, and brood over that, in oblivion of the numberless blessings of our redeemed lot.

Let us encamp by the waters of blessing, and that bitter spirit will fade, the very memory of it will

vanish away. The reason why so many hug their sorrows, is because they do not encamp by the healing waters. They have a certain contact with living religion, but their main interests are in the desert of this world. When, however, we settle down to enjoy the blessings of God's grace, when we make the culture of our immortal souls a chief end of life, we find in the practice of religion, not merely refreshment, but immunity from the harassing cares of worldliness, quiet of soul, a full, sequestered life of inward communion. Encanopied by God, overshadowed by His protecting love, as by these great palm-fronds, we recover calm, and equipoise, and a sweet reasonableness, and an all-spanning trust, and an overmastering hope and joy, which make us strangely indifferent to the hard rubs of life, and alive only to the realities of the soul and of heaven.

We must not make too much, however, even of Elim. It was, after all, but a stage to Sinai. Our seasons of quiet communion and spiritual joy are designed as helps, to fit for fuller service and higher consecration. If our rest-times do not leave us stronger, more resolved in soul for all God's will, they have failed of their end.

XVII

THE GIVING OF THE MANNA

EXODUS xvi.

MODERN descriptive writers who have taken upon them to tell the story of this period, slur over these discreditable murmurings at Marah, and in the wilderness of Sin. As compared with the deliverance from Egypt on the one hand, and the conflict with the Amalekites on the other, these appear beneath the dignity of history. If that be so, however, it is strange that they bulk so large in this narrative. And, more striking still, the sweet singers of Israel, who, in their later day, read this narrative with the piercing vision of prophets, and not with the surface talent of literary insight, made much of these unheroic circumstances. For proof of this turn to Psalms lxxviii. and cvi.

What if these men, after all, took the right view of this history? What if this be, not a half-legendary narrative of prehistoric times; what if it be, not an ideal reconstruction or fancy portraiture belonging to a much later age; but a real picture, of God's coming down into living contact with men, of His foundation in human history of a great world-purpose, broadening on till it reached perfect manifestation in Christ's

kingdom of heaven? That being so, the significant points in this history being the principles of God's dealing with men, the method by which He realised His purpose of love in relation to them, and the manner in which He educated their faith and wrought with and through their unstable wills, these narratives are especially significant and precious. This history becomes a parable of the spiritual life, of man's contact with God, and of God's gracious and creative contact with men. Despite all differences of dispensation, these great common facts of the life with God, make resistless appeal to the experience of every spiritual man. And the very circumstance that, across so many centuries, from a stage so far removed from ours, there comes a story that so fits in to our experience of God, and is so illuminative as to God's dealing with us, is proof sufficient to us, that, however this narrative came, with such a grasp of central reality, it cannot be a frothwork of human imagination, but must be true to the core.

Such thoughts, like a chemical re-agent, bring out from behind the simplicity of the narrative the true significance of this incident. But let us to our story. We left the children of Israel under the palms of Elim, and by the springing wells. Starting thence, they march southward on the high table-land, broken here and there by the sharp cleft of a wady, and camp the first night not far from the Red Sea. Of that encampment we read nothing here, as it passed without noticeable incident. The whole company could not but have been greatly heartened by the divine goodness at Marah and Elim. As they strike inland, however, across the high plateau of Debbet er Ramleh,

or the wilderness of Sin, a new source of anxiety obtrudes itself. The provisions which they carried with them were being exhausted. And the very direction of their march, as they toiled on into the heart of this inhospitable tract, would give emphasis to their fears. Writers tell us that the peninsula of Sinai was more fertile then than now, but even then it could not have sustained a host so vast. And as, losing sight of the sea, they found themselves with every forward step borne farther into the heart of the wilderness, whose silent and barren spaces ringed them round on every hand to the curving band of sky, faith began to fail, memories of past deliverance fade under pressure of present anxiety, and fear lets loose the lower impulses of the man to fume and fret, with reasonless impatience, of present want and pain.

Sometimes during fevers, in seasons of reason's eclipse, there break out even from sainted lips, vomitings of the coarser man that grace has crucified. Ay, and not unseldom in faith's eclipse, the old nature in children of God breaks out into most repulsive manifestation. These Israelites that dog the footsteps of Moses and Aaron, slinging through the clear air angry words of criticism and hate, were the very men who had been with God in the cloud and the sea, who had in a night snapped the fetters of ages, and stepped out in the morning light, freemen by the mighty act of the Most High. And yet not more than a few days after a great deliverance, this is how they pule and whimper, 'Would to God we had died.' Their faith has sunk as into a grave. No recognition survives of past beneficence or of future promise. But they proceed from spiritlessness to downright indignity

and insult. 'Would we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt.' This is His reward for the lightening of their bondage, for the overthrow of their tyrant, for liberty, for unrivalled miraculous might. Small-souled impatience brushes them aside as things of nought, and says, 'Would He had rather struck us dead before one of these things took place.' And what prompted this thirst to be disinherited of all that should have been their glory—this base craving for dissolution? Ah, it is good for us to see the kind of material out of which God makes His saints, the base and despicable things by whom He, in His overcoming grace, accomplishes His ends. 'Would we had died, when we sat by the flesh-pots of Egypt and did eat bread to the full.' They actually flaunt in God's face their slaves' pottage, as something which they prefer to all His gifts. And then, mounting to the height of unreason, they refuse to look at any shred of meaning in God's dealings, they forget memory and hope, and say, 'Ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

What an outburst of the rebellious impulses of human nature, against the guiding of God! A mere imaginative writer would have shrunk from depicting such a scene. It would seem to do violence to probability. 'What kind of keeping,' he would have said, 'is there between this, and that song whose echoes have scarce died away?' 'Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.' But there are other standpoints than that of the imaginative writer. As we read, there starts out upon us in letters of fire, a picture drawn with the piercing vision of the Holy

Ghost of that vile, inevitable self, which is in us as in these men, that

‘Coward with pathetic voice,
Who craves for ease and rest and joys.’

Ay, reader, that lower, coarser, viler self, to which the will of God has no constraint, nor the goodness of God any charms, but which fastens on the immediate satisfaction of individual desire, and regards everything from that standpoint—is in us all! Oh, the hard constructions which we have put on God’s acts, when clouds have darkened the sky! How we have incensed with flattery our deceived and injured self, railing at our fellows, railing at the injustice of fate, when we had better have looked within! How we have fretted over little pleasures denied us, or rapt away, refusing, like Jonah, to rise up to any broad views of God’s dealings, harping ever on this loss! This God-disowning, good-defying spirit is in us all, and if we are in the Kingdom to-day, it is because God has so far conquered, and broken it, and given a new spirit sway.

And now, come and see how God deals with His thankless and unreasonable children. It is enough to break the heart of a stone. They had met His goodness with murmurings. After such experiences of kindness at Marah and Elim, still they murmured. And yet God meets them with more love. He makes the occasion of their need, the opportunity for another display of divine power. Hitherto He had sent gleams of miracle, lightening for a moment the night of their sorrow, but now that He has brought them into liberty, He is going to base their lives on a daily miracle of divine provision. Surely that is

Godlike! And what a parallel it presents to the condition of renewed and sanctified men, who, brought out of bondage, live day by day in direct dependence on God, and through that indwelling of the Spirit, which makes Christ, the heavenly manna, the life of their souls.

The first whisper of this gracious purpose comes to Moses. Was ever man in such a deadlock, with two million people in this great and terrible wilderness, and no supplies? But Moses had come to rest, where all daring toilers for God have rested ever since. What a leap of thankful, adoring love must have gone up from Moses' heart when the word came, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven upon you.' He sees that it is to be a permanent, not a temporary provision:—the message makes that manifest. And more, God lets His servant see that this is no boon extorted by complaint, no makeshift blessing devised to still these clamouring tongues. Far from that, God is moving on in the depths of His own eternal counsel. This is part of His great moral discipline, by which He will prove whether they will walk in His law.

With what awe and wonder of God, who is thus revealing His inmost soul in His acts, and with what a mounting of eagle-winged faith, does Moses acquaint Aaron, and with Aaron go to the people! You can see what he has passed through, in the whole tone of His words. There is not a vestige of self-sufficiency. Even querulousness is utterly absent from his tone. Behold these two sweep into their places among the excited throng, with that in their faces—a revealing look, compact of gladness and wonder and awe—that hushes into expectancy even these turbulent souls.

'God has spoken through His servants,' is the conclusion flashing simultaneously through every mind. And they are still, ceasing from their thoughts to hear what God will say. The voice of Aaron swells into trumpet volume and resonance, in the utter silence of that sandy expanse. 'At even,'—why, even now the sun was far on its way—'at even—this very night—ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you out from the land of Egypt.' Ay, they were not to live on memories, even of deliverance and Red-Sea crossings! God ever and anon, in the experience of each new time, was to re-authenticate, and, according to present need, was to re-establish their liberty. Nor should our redemption be a tradition. We do not live on the memory of conversion or renewal. Here, and now, by His living Spirit, in the actual experience of communion and fellowship with God, would He make our souls throb with the consciousness of life and power.

Let us pause to point out a little discrepancy here. In verses 4 and 5 we read nothing about the quails, but only about the manna. Whereas, when Moses comes out to the people, the first thing he speaks of is of the descent of quails. From the opposed points of this discrepancy, there flashes on the seeing eye a beautiful chapter of soul-history. Has it not struck you that the success of this onward step in Israel's discipline hung at first on the faith of Moses? Burdened with the responsibility of making provision for this people, he might have turned from God's word in cynical doubt. 'Will God make windows in heaven?' he might satirically have said. Or faith might only have been reached, slowly and by difficult steps. And in the latter case, though the faith was

so little honouring to him, God would have been true to His word. Here, however, the word of Jehovah was met by a response so immediate and whole-souled, that God honours it, by adding to the great permanent benefaction of the manna, the immediate satisfaction of need, in the gift of quails.

Ay, verily, we require to have emphasised from time to time, what we owe to the mountain-heights of faith in specially consecrated men. There have been moments in the history of God's kingdom, that have contained potentialities of blessing for centuries. And the towering confidence in God of individual men, has made these actualities. It was John Knox, who rose up and dared to believe that God could snap the fetters of Rome's spiritual tyranny, and give Scotland a free, enlightened, scriptural faith. And twelve generations of Scotsmen have reaped the fruits of that heroic trust.

It was meet that God should honour such trust as that of Moses. But this was by no personal blessing, but by a fuller outpouring of love on His people. God knew His servant's heart. There are some religious workers and leaders, who are never happy, except attention is being attracted to themselves, except this honour and that distinction are being put upon them. Yea, such depths of ignominy have been known, as a man angling, or laying himself out, for these. But even now the spirit was in Moses, which he showed later, in asking God to let him die if the people were not to be pardoned. And so God blessed Moses best, by heightening His blessing to His people. As the bread multiplied in Christ's breaking of it, the promise seemed to grow as Moses essayed through his spokesman to repeat it. 'At even, ye shall know

God's presence, and in the morning ye shall see His glory.' God was not to wait till to-morrow morning to show His power in the manna. He anticipated want by the evening flight of quails. Do you know naught of this? When, in some hour of distress, you have trusted God definitely and immediately for a specific blessing, has He never doubled it, or added something for love?

Notice that distinction which Moses draws between presence and glory. When God visits with an immediate blessing, we feel His presence. But when He opens up a continuous course of blessing, we are caught up into the circle of His thought, and see something of His glory. God speaks, as if this of the manna were to be a continuous boon, repeated week by week. He must have some settled thought, then, as to what He is to do for them, while they are being thus miraculously preserved. What a wonderful Being is God! How far-seeing are His plans, how deep beyond all human conceiving His thought!

But in these details we have been losing sight of the scene. Moses and Aaron are in the midst of the great congregation. The multitudes have just heard of the impending revelations of God's power and love. And their deeper natures have been touched. The clouds of their discontent begin to roll back. Like a mountain range that had been hidden by morning mists, the great memories and experiences of the soul, stand abrupt, sublime, in the near past. They are arrested, however, in their first pulses of joy, by a sobering thought. Jehovah hath heard this murmuring as against Himself. Moses and Aaron are nothing, and less than nothing—men, instruments

in God's hands. He is their leader, and against Him every murmuring has been.

And yet He has acted thus. 'Ay, but listen,' said Moses, 'to the full tale of His mercy and goodness. The Lord shall give you, in the evening, flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full. His preparations have all been made. Every want shall be supplied. He stoops to your little faith. He meets your pitiful mistrust and weakness with blessing beyond blessing. You malign the source of infinite good (for every cry has been against His administration, not ours), and yet He seeks not to avenge, He stays not to punish. He has undertaken your case, your every want is His care, and so He has put Himself into your place, considered how He might forestall your difficulties, and obviate those outbursts of fear. And of His own motion, taking everything into account, He has, in this miracle of the manna, provided for your great physical want as it recurs.'

This is not the manner of men. This is God's great, magnanimous love, portrayed in words inspired by the Holy Ghost. No less an artist could have so unveiled God's heart. Have you never known God thus coming over the mountain of your transgression, in the fulness of His love? This is God, as Christ taught Him, and the Spirit reveals Him, and only in such light has such glory been ever unveiled. Let men say what they please, this is a living part of the one revelation of the Most High.

While through the divine words and actings, in that early day, we thus find throbbing the one indestructible spirit of revelation, everything shows us that we are at an earlier and primitive stage. It was by an outward appearance that He brought home the

awe of His presence, not, as now, by an inflashing of His divine Spirit. As they looked toward the wilderness, His glory appeared in the cloud. Think of the desert spaces, of the riven summits, of the great Sinaitic range rising into the cloudless air, and before them, toward that unknown region, a visible embodiment of the glory of the Lord. For these children of time's morning, could aught have been more impressive? Even we, the more sophisticated children of time's last age, have been thrilled once and again, by sublime and exceptional natural circumstances, to the brink of tears. As in God's sight and at His command, are recited their murmuring, and the goodness of God. Have we not here God educating His people, through failure and by great mercy, to a fuller recognition of Himself? The discipline of Sinai is already begun. They are in the school in which we have been during all our spiritual life, being taught through the divine dealings with us, the depth of the divine love.

While all this was transpiring, the day would well-nigh have run its course. As the sun was setting, borne, it may be, by a strong wind, a vast cloud of quails fell exhausted into the camp. Round about their tents, the fluttering creatures lay in myriads. How foolish is our mistrust! How royal is His power to accomplish His behests! 'He makes His angels winds, His ministers a flame of fire.' It would be useless to realise the joy and feasting in all their borders. Then the vast camp is lapped in slumber, and only the pillar of fire, like the eye of God, keeps watch and ward. With the great word of God lying deep in their minds under the veil of sleep, they would spring with the dawn from slumber, and look out on

the grey still world with the heavy dews of night
lying all around.

‘Faster and more fast,
O’er night’s brim day boils at last,
Boils pure gold o’er the cloud-cup’s brim.’

And then, as the dews rise, what is this that they see? That was the very question which rose to every lip, giving the thing a name. What they saw was a small round thing, as small as the hoar-frost on the ground. And while they looked, Moses cried, ‘This is the thing which the Lord commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating.’ An omer, or three English quarts, is spoken of as a measure. Look at the children of Israel, spread over the wide expanse, diligently gathering this heavenly provision. To us who regard this whole narrative as an inspired record of the founding of the Kingdom of God, this cannot be of merely pictorial value. The whole incident is charged with profoundest meaning. Here were this people who left Egypt in faith, and crossed the Red Sea in like dependence on God, dislodged from all ordinary supply, even of nature’s ever-recurring wants, and brought to rest every day on the faithfulness of God. Yet the supply is as unfailing as if it came from groaning barns or harvest-fields. Would God this lesson from the world’s morning were written in our hearts! God would have us, who have broken with sin, and crossed over into liberty in Christ, to live right on by faith on the strength that is in Christ Jesus. There is a life above the world, with Christ and in the power of the Holy Ghost, which Christians may and ought to live, week in, week out,—guided, sustained, impelled, empowered, for every duty and

end of life, by resources that are divine. That is the one condition, on which the life-discipline of Sinai can go successfully on.

We find, then, in Israel's daily trust in God for material provision, an emblem of the believer's continuous trust for all spiritual provision. The parallel is obvious. And as you pursue the study, you will find many incidental proofs, that the former is intended to be the analogue of the other. Look first at the seeming naturalness of this supernatural provision. From the thorns of the tamarisk, there falls at certain seasons on the sticks and stones, a substance which hardens into a kind of manna. On the leaves of another plant, there gathers a sort of meal, which is made into manna. The manna of commerce exudes from a kind of ash-tree, when a puncture is made by an insect. And these have more or less resemblance to the manna spoken of here. But when you think of the place, of the enormous quantity required, of the supply day by day for forty years, the miraculous source of this manna is self-evident. And so the divine provision which Christ makes for our spiritual needs, is a secret provision. The world will not allow that there is anything in it which they cannot know. What we must do, is so to live by faith in the power of God,—is for the whole church of God so to live continuously in dependence on divine supplies, that the outward effects of that fellowship shall demonstrate the reality of the divine indwelling and working in men.

Bear with us while we deduce another resemblance. To walk by faith, whether for material or spiritual provision, means that we must be absolutely at the disposal of God. He makes His demands positive

and unyielding, that we may be made to feel the reality of that great will to which we must bow. One command of God was that they were to gather just enough for the day. 'Let no man leave of it until the morning.' Yes, it must be real, honest, entire dependence on God, day by day,—not half dependence on God, half on your accumulated stores. And so we cannot stand upon our merits, or our services, or even upon the formed graces and powers of our spiritual life, but must come out of ourselves every moment to rest, as entirely as ever we rested, on the grace and power of Christ. Oh, it is difficult, wellnigh impossible, at times, one would think, to wean Christians from this self-trust! God has to make their fancied strength stink, as He made the stored manna of Israel.

But God is sovereign, and He can sovereignly make exception to His own rules. One thing we learn when we come to live by faith in God. We rediscover the meaning and preciousness of religious observances, which we made light of before. We have not yet come to Sinai. God has not yet uttered the Ten Commandments. But the Israelites knew about the Sabbath. That had come down to them from the Creation, as archæology makes more and more apparent. But we hear nought of it in the practice of Israel. It had fallen into abeyance, as, in the dying down of the Spiritual, it is falling into abeyance with multitudes to-day.

When God comes near His people, however, when He enters into close personal relations with them, when He draws them to live by faith upon Him, He re-authenticates this institution, He imbeds its observance in the heart of His gracious provisions for

their needs. Was there ever a day of power in the history of God's kingdom, in which the Sabbath did not rise to a new dignity and win wider homage?

That they might have rest, the Israelites had no manna-gathering on the seventh day. That involved physical toil. But in Gospel times the great manna-gathering day is the Sabbath. For our manna is spiritual, and in gathering it from word and ordinance the nature finds its deepest rest.

For forty years the Israelites lived upon this manna. All our life long, we must depend on the heavenly manna, for every atom of spiritual strength. Faith is the very condition, of life, of a progressive discipline, of constant victory.

When we have fought great battles, we take the standards, pierced with shot, singed with flame, and hang them in national sanctuaries. If Moses had had an eye for the picturesque, might he not have kept some memorial of the Red Sea flood—banner or blazonry, or broken war-chariot? How that would have thrilled succeeding times! So judges the carnal man. But man and man's grandest achievements are for the hour, and pass with the hour which gave them birth. We are too prone, in one sense, to extol those mighty works of man, in some great spiritual birth-hour. We may dwell upon and deify the past, in such a way as to emasculate the present. We would make them a *ne plus ultra* for all time to come. Let us fix our thoughts rather on God's sovereign love, meeting our needs day by day. We can never make too much of that. It was the pot of manna, symbol of this constant grace, which Moses laid up before the Lord.

XVIII

AT REPHIDIM

EXODUS xvii. 1-13

WE now leave the tableland of Debbet er Ramleh, and pass into the narrow valleys and under the mighty shadows of the bare, riven, granitic mountain-masses of Sinai. No note is taken here, of at least two halting-places, the writer hurrying on to Rephidim, the last stage before Sinai. Whether, according to prevailing opinion, Rephidim was in the beautiful Wady Feiran, or farther east in Wady Es Sheikh, this is hardly the place to determine. Let it suffice to note that we are well within the great range of Horeb, and only a day's journey from that place where Moses at the burning bush had the soul-enthraling converse with God, and from that mount on which the Law was to be given.

But, alas ! our great mercies are often obscured and hidden from view by trifling troubles and despicable sins. Moses must have been stirred to the depths, re-entering these august solitudes. Could he forget the divine token, now so marvellously fulfilled, or on the edge of fulfilment, which he received when but a poor shepherd, feeding, in these uplands, his scanty flock ? He can remember yet, the almost

incredulity, with which in these regions he received the divine word. 'When thou hast brought thy people out of Egypt ye shall serve God in this mountain.' Yet even this, and by what glorious divine intervention, has come to pass. And now, the very thought of what God may have in store for them at the mountain, which so soon their eyes are to see, excites the intensest wonder and awe. All the past,—the marvels of God's power and love,—suggest that they are but the preparations for some unutterably glorious unveiling of His being and will.

While these thoughts, however, are but mantling in the brooding contemplation of Moses, they are suddenly scattered to the winds. A tumult rises in the camp. With flushed faces and angry looks, a great crowd storms into his presence. 'Give us water to drink!' is their cry. In their impatience of even a momentary affliction, they have broken through all constraints of reverence, of obligation, of shame. No matter what God has done, the deliverance He has wrought, the succours He has sent, they flame out at the first touch of suffering into the bitterest petulance and towering selfishness. Faith is in eclipse, the animal in them only is awake. What a daring soul-draughtsman is the writer of this book! We would fear to paint souls, in whom there is any scrap of faith, in such a situation. But look on his hand-work, and let each man discern his own portrait. In hours of fear, whether from peril, or financial perplexity, or some other cause, has faith never been submerged, and the apprehensions and passions of the natural man flared forth? Have you, under these impulses, never spoken words and done things, for which in the light of faith you are ashamed?

By Moses' magnificent strength in this emergency, we are reminded of certain words of our Scottish Reformer. 'I have luiked,' he said on one occasion, 'on the faces of many angry men and not been moved above measure.' But there is more than manliness in Moses' calm confronting of the crowd. With a moral majesty truly sublime, he arrests them in full tide of their passion, and turns them round to look full in the face their sin. 'Why chide you with me? You know that your controversy is not with me. Your conduct reveals mistrust of, ingratitude to, God. In thus renouncing all trust, disowning all obligation, and venting your foul suspicion and causeless hate, you are tempting God to break with you for ever.'

Their only answer to this, is louder murmuring, more passionate and reasonless denunciation, a madness of rage in which they can hardly keep murderous hands off the servant of God. 'What shall I do?' cried Moses; 'they are almost ready to stone me.'

Some one, in the interests of historic dignity, may object to these monotonous repetitions, as they seem to him, of popular murmuring and recrimination. Might they not have been slurred over, and valuable historical details inserted instead? You will have to realise that this is a soul-history, a picture of the manner in which our poor human nature acts in relation to the living God,—a picture drawn from the centre, not from the surface, in the piercing light of heavenly inspiration, and therefore imperishable in significance and value. And as to monotony, why, it is the opposite of that,—a most sad progression that we find. Nothing in these narratives will pay any believer better, than a study of these successive mur-

murings, and of God's dealing with them. Nothing will kindle a deeper awe of God, as One who, with all His tenderness and love, is not to be trifled with even for an hour. In His great-heartedness, our Father is tolerant of mere human frailty. At the first outcry, He recognised a people unaccustomed to desert trial, and He sweetened Marah; and on the back of this he gave them the springing wells of Elim. Even a second time, when hunger threatens,—so generous is our Father,—He passes by ingratitude and unbelief, and sends quails and the permanent benefaction of manna from heaven. But these acts of grace were performed to be remembered, that in new trials they might be recalled, and inspire confidence and submission.

When, however, that is not the case, when, at the first darkening of new trial, not only is God's past goodness not recalled, but the darkest mistrust and the most vengeful passions are displayed, then it is plain as day, that faith is being undermined in these souls, and that another spirit is taking its place. Mere goodness now would be putting a premium on unbelief and self-will. True, grace must still prevail. Has not God passed His word, that He is bringing them out of Egypt, to lead them into the promised land; and until their faith has been entirely renounced, is He not under obligation to fulfil His purpose? He will give them, then, the supply of their want. Despite their unworthiness, He will display His wonderful divine power on their behalf. But it will be in such a way, and with such attendant circumstances, as to burn the memory, and some sense of the heinousness of sin, into their hearts.

And the Lord said, 'Go on before the people, and

take with thee of the elders of Israel, and the rod wherewith thou smotest the river, and go.' The multitudes were in no mood, they were unworthy, to see the mighty act of God. He will have no anger, or unbelief, or self-will, in the shrine of His secret presence. Only those who are childlike and submissive, are carried into that inmost shrine, to see and feel the glory of His power. Thousands upon thousands drink of the water, who do not see the rock struck. And so there are multitudes on multitudes, at this hour, who not only profit from the indirect effects of religion, but who know something of its comfort and refreshment, who are not living in momentary obedience to God, and in such a consciousness of His presence, that faith is strong to expect and receive direct outflashings of His power. Lack of obedience, nursed self-will, outbursts of human passion, despite all the grace that is in them, are keeping them at a distance from God, without either the temper or the faith in which they can receive great things from His hand.

Look at the temper to which God reveals Himself in wonder-working power. It is a temper of absolute obedience. To the very letter of every command, it does God's will. But not only does it bow to God's will, it receives God's testimony. Listen: 'Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it.' Had you been there between these mountain-walls, and under that burning sky, you would have seen nothing but the bare rock. And what you saw, Moses would see,—that and nothing more. But Moses had an inner eye. He lived evermore in the presence of God. Jehovah had so

witnessed to the reality of His existence in the depths of His soul, He had so proved his faithfulness in a hundred trial-hours, that Moses had an absolute conviction of His faithfulness.

When, then, God said to him, 'Look not at the hot sand, look not at this parched rock, look at Me; I am here in My infinite power to give water from its thirsty womb,' Moses' faith rose up and took God at His word. When God said 'Smite,' he smote, and the waters flowed forth.

When you read of wonders of faith, of marvels of grace, wrought through individuals in this age, do you think they come by chance? No, they come to souls, who have been perfected in just such a hard discipline of obedience, and who have risen up to such a vision of God, through submission. Read the narratives of such victories of faith, and in every case you will find a situation like this, circumstances which seemed absolutely to forbid success. But trained in the school of implicit trust, the men who achieved them, heard God in His word and by His promises say to them, 'Look not upon the difficulties; I am here, upon them, in the very heart of them, to give you victory in the measure of your faith.' What hinders you from being a spiritual hero, is your unsubdued self-sufficiency, that conceit of strength or wisdom, that self-willed attitude, which keeps you far off from, in an unreceptive spirit before, the Most High.

But, blessed be God, His mercy flows to very unworthy recipients! From the riven rock the water gushes forth, so that all may drink. Even in the very fulness of His grace, however, God is wonderfully discriminating. Every manifestation of His love

comes, with a deepening of the sense of sin, and with a distinct upward thrust, inclining the soul to God and good. See how God intertwines the memory of His freely-flowing grace, with the sad memory of their sins! He gives this place, through His servant, the name of their transgression. Yea, He gives it two names, and in each a history—Massah and Meribah. Whenever they reverted to the itinerary of their journey, there they would start up—Massah and Meribah. Whenever they recalled the marvellous miracle of the springing well, lo! there was, intertwined with it, Massah and Meribah. And what did they mean? We might paraphrase the significance thus: ‘Here you tempted God to cast you off, because your murmuring had risen to the verge of unfaith.’

A lesson wells up from the dry lips of the double name. Our life has not been without many falls. But have we ever had any experience like this? Is there any beacon in our soul’s backward history that marks a season of special self-will, when we came near breaking with God—ay, when we came near tempting God to break with us? Another step on our part, and God and we might have gone asunder for ever. God forgave. Yea, how wonderful was the riches of His grace! But He has left some scar, or thorn, from that hour to be a witness to that falling away, for ever.

Why? That we may be moved to contrition by the contrasted spectacles of our own sin and of the riches of divine grace. Sinai was just at hand. The great moral discipline of Sinai was going to begin. It was meet that they should go up humbled and self-emptying to that lofty experience of communion with

God. And if God is humbling us, if He is marking the rocks of sin on which we may make shipwreck, be assured He is seeking to lead us on to some fuller manifestation of His grace.

On the other hand, if they would disregard His warning and remain heedless of reproof, here, marked for all time, was the fatal beginning of their fall. Thus did they rebel, and thus did God surmount their rebellion with His exceeding grace. And so God's goodness would be vindicated, and their wanton sinfulness laid bare. Be not high-minded, but fear. If we were to go astray we could not say a word, for, written in the very stuff of our own souls, we have memories which would condemn us and justify God.

And now ensue circumstances which throw a lurid light upon the folly of all this contention. Hitherto God has marvellously preserved them, from coming into contact with armed parties, Egyptian and other, for from the earliest times, the region of Sinai was frequented, for mining purposes, by the emissaries of the Pharaohs. Now, however, while discontent is being fomented in their ranks, a powerful enemy is hanging on their rear, and is at present condensing in great clouds of armed men to contest their further passage. Some have thought, although it is nowhere directly stated, that these were descendants of Esau. At all events, they held the supremacy by force of arms in all that region, and their reputation was at stake in this battle with the intruding power of Israel.

Can you not fancy the anxiety of Moses as he beheld these formidable foes deploying into the open valley? Up till now, God had fought for them. But now, to all appearance, His people must stand the

shock of war. And they are wholly untried, unarmed, undisciplined. And more, they are in the worst possible temper to be so suddenly confronted with so terrific a crisis. Still, God had brought them into this place. He had permitted this emergency, and He would defend them.

And now emerges a circumstance which we suppose the greater number of us had entirely overlooked. Beholding his magnificent strength, courage, and endurance, we have instinctively thought of Moses as in manhood's prime. But he is fourscore, hale and firm, no doubt, but having neither the rude energy nor the agility necessary for war. And now there steps forth into the public view one who was to fill a large place in the life of the Chosen People for the following fifty years. Born about the time Moses fled into Midian, Joshua is now forty years of age, a warrior without fear or reproach. In what emergencies he had revealed his splendid qualities, we do not know, but Moses had marked his man. Such strength of character, firmness of purpose, capacity for leadership, and profound, unquestioning faith, could not be hid. Moses speaks as to an equal. He shows his perfect confidence in him. He leaves him free to form his own plans. 'Choose us out men and go out to fight with Amalek.' What a pleasure it must have been to serve Moses! When he got his man, he trusted him. He did not tie his servant up with all sorts of provisos and restrictions, to show his own importance.

Not that he was not to be heart and soul in this conflict. 'To-morrow,' he says, 'will I stand on that hill, with the rod of God in mine hand.' This, he felt, was to be a victory of faith, as truly as the crossing

of the Red Sea. But while that was wholly by divine power, without one stroke of battle, this victory was to be given, through battle, as the crown of their utmost exertion and bravery. Joshua showed his faith by the completeness of his preparations. Feeling certain that nothing would be wanting on God's part, he picked his men, chose his ground, determined his plan of attack, resolved that nothing should be wanting in him. And Moses' heart was with him in all that work. Had he been younger and stronger he would have done it himself. But yet, in and through all that, there was as absolute reliance on God, as when they stood to see the waters overwhelm their enemies.

The morrow dawns. Moses, with Aaron, and Hur, whom tradition speaks of as the husband of Miriam, go up to some lesser eminence overhanging the plain. Meantime Joshua passes through his lines, noting, as we may believe, the disposition of his forces, heartening his men. Amalek had forced this conflict, but Joshua begins it. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of peace. But if heathenism, or human selfishness, or sin, force upon us a conflict, then we are not to shun it. We have interests more precious than life, for which we should be ready to give life. True, as belonging to a much later era in the history of that kingdom, in which the truth and spirit of Christ have come more fully to prevail, we know many other methods of settling differences, than the rough-and-ready arbitrament of the sword. Yea, we have entered into the overcoming power of self-sacrificing love, learning the blessedness of renouncing personal right, and foregoing personal advantage, to win our brother. But, whatever means may be open to us, by which to

win, the cause of right, of duty, of God is paramount, and everything, to life itself, must be pledged to secure the victory. In this easy, luxurious, time-serving age, men have forsaken the shrine of principle to worship at the dubious altar of compromise. They call by Christ's holy name of peace, which is a fruit of the Spirit and the outcome of supreme allegiance to right, those worldly and artificial concordats, in which truth is sacrificed to a timid expediency, and the main anxiety seems to be to stave off the necessity of ceasing from self and the world, to make up one's mind. Peace! Yes, that is peace, but it is the peace of death, of a decayed faith, of a decomposed public spirit, of men whose real faith is in the material, to whom the will of a holy God is an unsubstantial dream.

But we must hasten. Look at Moses on that hill-top. What tides are surging through his soul! The cause of Israel, of religion, of God, is hanging on the issues of that confused and complicated conflict. And all that that meant for the future of humanity, even Moses did not see. If Israel had melted away under the passionate onset of these masterful Bedouin, the history of the world would have been on an altogether lower plane, lacking what has been its mightiest sustaining moral force. But even Moses saw far, and realising that the glory of God hung on the issues of that hour, he lifted up his hand. In the very attitude, there was a direct appeal to the overcoming power of God. He had not been commanded to do this, as he had been to strike the rock. This was an inference of faith, and so is the direct prototype of believing prayer. Moses stood at an infinite remove from attaching any magical efficacy to his rod.

God had once and again commanded him to prove this infinite power, by stretching forth the rod. Here and now, he is shut up to a forthputting of God's power. He cannot see how ruin is to be averted, unless He put forth His power. And so he stretched out his hand, to show that he is trusting God, as he trusted Him by the Nile, on the Red Sea shore, and yesterday at the rock.

And what was the response? Instantly he could see the line of Amalek bend, and Israel bear on. But when, carried out of himself with joy, he forgot the attitude and spirit of prayer, and his arms flagged and fell, the tide of battle turned. Then in an agony he fell back on the faithfulness and power of God, and, lo! Israel with a shout rushed on to victory. How steadily he fixed his gaze, how resolutely he raised his arms, till, for very weariness, he began to yield. Again the swarthy sons of the plains win a temporary advantage. Had Moses stood alone, it might have gone ill with Israel. But he had helpers. They found a large stone on which he might rest. They themselves—Aaron and Hur—held up his hands. Through the long day, through the lengthening shadows of afternoon, till like a ball of fire the sun sank in the west, those hands pointed to heaven, and Amalek went back till, broken, scattered, pursued, they were entirely overthrown.

Would that the meaning of that scene were burned in upon every heart! Every spiritual victory is a victory of faith, an answer to prayer. The conversion of a soul, the quickening of a church, the overthrow of a social wrong, the development of a new spiritual activity, is a blessing coming as straight from the hand of God as the smiting of the Red Sea.

All the might of man, all the power of committees, cannot effect that. And these blessings come from God, only as they are expected, as some one has the prevailing faith to bring them down. The prayer of faith, then, is the supreme necessity of the Kingdom of God. And who should be holding up his hands in prayer, if not the minister of Christ? But now a multitude of people conspire to bring him down from that mount. He must sit on a score of public boards, head a movement for this, find a situation for that other,—in a word, he is the man who everybody thinks can be got at, to do all sorts of occasional service, and consult on all sorts of schemes, as if he had nothing to do; whereas, of all men living, he carries, or ought to carry, the heaviest burden, and lies under the most tremendous responsibility.

We have found in this scene a divinely-drawn portrait of what has so often happened to oneself. Sometimes we get down to our knees in an utter sense of need. We throw upon God the whole burden of our responsibility. We tell Him that we are nothing, and less than nothing, but we declare our faith that, even through us, God may accomplish His purpose. How we have seen the sinner broken down, when we have gone forth in this surrendered frame! Then there are times when even our little measure of success, carries us off from an attitude of entire and simple faith. And at once, insensibly, the power vanishes, and the outward signs of power fail. We think we are getting on passing well, trading upon old experiences, working up old visions of the divine; but if we keep our eye on the edge of battle, we shall see that we are but gaining a loss. Critics blame the man, his ability, or his learning, or

his preparations. But the real reason is, that he is not in the dust, laying hold on the divine. They are having him now, and are justly tired of him, whereas formerly they had God through him.

Ay, but there is a more pitiful case, and it is the case of many a servant of God, when, through distraction, because of a multiplicity of duties, or, it may be, sheer exhaustion of spirit in daily drudgery, he finds himself dull and spiritless at a throne of grace. Faith is the loftiest exercise of the soul, loftier than thinking, loftier than imagination, loftier than the loftiest speculative flight. It is a laying hold, by the man's whole personality, on the living God. It is a dealing with God on the ground of all His past revelations, and all His promises of future good. The man who would have power with God, must be at home in that high sphere. His true, deep, constant life must be in the heavenly places with Christ. He must dwell in a zone of holy quiet, and come out to daily duty from the midst of the eternal calm. He must have his own personal conflicts all resolved, so that his outer life is objective to its root, in the will of God and in the service of man. He must, in the freshness of his spirit, as the first business of his calling, mount into the sphere of communion, and in the fulness of every power hold converse with the Holy Eternal God.

If men could see, as Moses saw, how the issues of the great world-conflict between darkness and light, between evil and good, between the devil and God, swayed momentarily, now this way, now that, in the measure of the living, consciously exercised faith of God's saints, how differently they would act! Even Aaron and Hur would count it the highest honour

to be helpers of these wrestlers with God. And backed up by the strength, the devotion, the cheerfully rendered sacrifice of these willing workers, those whom God has called to deal directly with Him in overcoming faith, would be heartened to expect greater things, would be lifted up into a steadfastness of prevailing trust, which would be crowned with an abundant answer.

XIX

JEHOVAH-NISSI

EXODUS xvii. 14-16

OLIVER CROMWELL was wont to keep the anniversaries of his crowning mercies. And it were well, if, in this respect, we imitated the great Protector. There is no child of God without his spiritual Nasebys and Marston Moors. But, alas! we far too often let them fall into oblivion. Now we might say, that in this we do Him who has given us the victories a great wrong. But we rather assert, what this whole discourse will illustrate and confirm, that in this we show a singular lack of perception, and do ourselves grievous damage. Our acts are very often makeshift, having nothing in them but what serves the necessity of the moment. But God's acts—the very least of them—are never of that character. Even His most individual dealing,—the simplest motion of His will to meet a present need—has in it something of the universal and eternal, is the particular application of a divine principle, the positive revelation of a divine will. If you ponder these acts you will hear a voice of the Eternal in them, touching all your life, revealing a purpose of grace for the years to come.

Such a crowning mercy had at this moment befallen the Children of Israel. Delivered from Egyptian bondage, carried in safety through the Sea, escaped from the perils of the desert, and come within a day's march of Sinai, Moses and his people find themselves suddenly enveloped in what appears an imminent and crushing disaster. The Amalekites—the head of the heathen in that whole region—draw up at Rephidim to contest their further progress. A horde of slaves fronts a renowned tribe, inured to all hardship, and disciplined in war. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. And Jehovah takes this opportunity to teach Israel a new lesson of faith. Hitherto He had done great things for them—smote Egypt, opened up the Red Sea, sent quails, given manna from the skies, but now it is His will to leave the burden of action on them. They must into the imminent deadly breach. With all their generalship, and to the utmost of their strength, they must fight. And through their endeavours, fighting with them, God will give the victory. The special method of God's presence and working with His people is passing, and the normal, permanent method is coming. Yet, as they have learned, they must depend on God as entirely when He works with them, as when they stand still and behold His power.

And now, the emergency having passed, is the deliverance to be forgotten? We notice, as a very significant circumstance, that Jehovah does not leave the perpetuation of this great memory to individual impulse. He is laying the foundation stones of the first stage of the Kingdom of God, and everything has a special significance for the times to come. And

so He says to Moses, 'Write this for a memorial in the book.' There was a book, then, in the hands of the Lawgiver. Even already there had been writing in the book—at least such is the legitimate inference—beside which this memorial is to be placed. Twenty years ago—ay, even ten—the ascertained facts of antiquity, seemed to discountenance that assertion. But light has been pouring in during these last years on that early time. An alphabet has been discovered centuries older than the Phœnician, and from the ruins of a former Egyptian capital at Tel-el-Amarna an extensive correspondence has been recovered with Canaan and other countries, while the Israelites were still captives in Goshen.

No one can deny, we do not say the existence, but the common use of writing, among these Eastern peoples, in the age of the Exodus. And this being so, the particular reference to writing in the text, makes it morally certain that the great facts of the past—the vision of the burning bush, the glorious self-revelation of Jehovah, His purpose of mercy to Israel, had already been recorded. They had a bearing upon the future of God's people—being the charter of their liberties and the foundation of all their hopes—which made it imperative that the words should be at hand, to refer to, to found upon. And that being so,—contemporary documents being not only possible, but highly probable, and to be assumed,—the historical character of this narrative is removed from the region of reasonable doubt, and the critical question, so far as it affects inspiration, ceases seriously to trouble practical men.

You will pardon that digression, because of its practical value. The very bearing of God's command

irresistibly suggested it. For if it was necessary for the future, to hearten Joshua, that this victory be recorded in writing, there was a far wider and profounder necessity for recording revealed purposes of God, which, enshrined in an unveiling of His glory, constituted the keystone of the growing edifice of the nation's life.

But to hasten. This deliverance was worthy of remembrance, on many grounds, beside those to which we have already referred. This was their first taste of heathen hostility, and might be taken, therefore, as type and representative of that source of peril. God's giving them this victory, then, in answer to prayer, is an indication of His will to grant them like victory over every such hostile attack. Indeed, when one thinks of it, is not all this included in the original promise,¹ 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will take you to Me for a people, and I will bring you in unto the land'? Jehovah had thus plighted His word, while they were still in bondage, and did not that include victory over foes? If Amalek had conquered, God's promise had not been fulfilled. They see that now, but it did not strike them before. And so this deliverance takes on a deeper meaning, being a token that He has been keeping His word, an assurance and a prophecy that He will not fail till His word be fully accomplished. It is a thing, then, to be remembered, having bearings at once on the past and the time to come.

And so the deliverance you receive—yea, each deliverance, does not stand alone. It is a part fulfilment of God's promise of complete salvation

¹ Exodus vi. 6-8.

in Christ Jesus, an exemplification at some point of what, in God's view, is included in that promise, and so an assurance and prophecy of complete fulfilment. If you study it, you will find that on the one face it is a reflection of God's love on the Cross, while on the other face it catches some prelusive glory of the crown. If there be, then, such a blended glory of divine revelation in our mercies, why suffer them to pass into oblivion?

But more particularly, every deliverance involving any triumph over a hostile force raises a clear issue, which may and ought to be looked at to the end. 'You, Israel, are my people. You have my pledged word that I will lead you safe into the promised land. My honour stands identified with the fulfilment of that pledge to you. Whoever, then, stands up against you, to contest your onward progress, stands up against Me, and is predestined to failure. All that is included in my promise, and you must believe all that, and go upon that assumption and belief. See, these Amalekites, despite what they must have heard of My power in your deliverance, have set themselves against you. They have committed themselves to a policy of resistance. And so, despite numbers, bravery, energy, they must stand a beacon of ruin. Let faith be strong, to take in all that My deliverance implies. Understand, remember, you have my word;—put it down beside the story of Rephidim, "I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."'

When God gives a word, He expects it to be believed, grasped, acted upon. Judge what must be His quarrel with us, His people, who have promises as explicit and far more glorious than this, which,

Christians though we be, we are discounting, setting at naught, disbelieving. How many in Christian churches are buttoning up their pockets, in utter unbelief that the millions of China and India are going to be brought to Christ, despite the fact that God, their God, in whose salvation they profess to trust, has said, 'I am God and none else: I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow'? God has written that with the pen of the Spirit, in His book, that we might go upon the word with unquestioning faith; and yet how feeble is the faith of the best, how rampant the God-dishonouring unbelief of multitudes bearing the Christian name!

But though the recipients of His mercy may shame Him, by their coarse, unbelieving, worldly judgments, God has ever had those who have trusted Him and proved His power. When you have read the great doings of martyr and reformer, the wonderful records of spiritual victory achieved by prophets and apostles, you have said, 'Would that I might live a life like that!' Do you know all that you require to serve yourself an heir to these men, to stand in the direct line of the loftiest succession which this earth has seen? You will find the secret in my text. It is by acting faith in the divine promises. Yesterday, resting on the promises of God, Joshua—an utterly unknown man—led his hosts to battle. To-day, after saying to Moses, 'Write this for a memorial,' and adding His terrible word about Amalek, God enjoins His servant to rehearse this in the ears of Joshua. And so the unknown knight of yesterday, is invested with the sublime dignity of being God's champion to accomplish His will.

Very deeply did these words, embodying the story of his first crowning mercy, crowned with God's perennial promise, enter into the mind of this stainless knight of God. He laid them up in His soul among the unquestioned verities. Then, for months upon months, they passed out of mind. The Israelites pressed forward into new scenes, are agitated by fresh concerns. Such things, however, when once they are thus grasped, are seldom forgotten. They may fall down below the level of consciousness, they may even seem to fade from memory. But as snow-drops, sleeping all winter through, wake into life with the first breath of spring, so faith leaps up into life at the first call of emergency. Sinai past, and the journey having been resumed towards the promised land, Joshua finds himself on one occasion, with Caleb and other ten, chosen as spies to go forward and search the land. As they advance, they are roused to admiration by the fertility of the country, but the great majority come back mistrustful and downcast. 'The people be strong, the cities great and walled,' and chief among them are mentioned the Amalekites dwelling in the south country. Again faith fails the people, again they murmur. The discontent grows into a tumult, and threatens to become a revolution. They said one to another, 'Let us make a captain and return to Egypt.' But amid all the perils of this hour of insurrection, one stood firm. The promise of God rose up in unsubduable and resistless strength. One seems to catch, in the new words shaped to the emergency of the hour, an echo of the promise in which he had come to rest so long before. 'If the Lord delight in us, He will bring us into this land ; fear ye not the people of the land, they are

bread for us.' God had given them by promise to Israel as a prey. They needed but to claim the promise, to rest on God's word, to claim the victory.

When Joshua came to die he could say, reverting to the past, 'There hath not failed one good thing of all that the Lord hath promised.' He was a man who took God at His word, who went on in faith, who rendered an implicit obedience to the divine will. And his life was marked by uniform victory. We remember, indeed, that on one occasion, just after the return of the spies, he saw these Israelites whom he had led to triumph at Rephidim, fleeing before the very Amalekites whom on that day they had utterly overpowered. But that only strengthened his faith, for then they were fighting without God, acting in the teeth of His positive command. Then indeed he saw, as never before, the sovereignty of God in the former victory—that not his generalship, nor the Hebrews' prowess, but God's turning of the balance of natural advantage in favour of His people, had secured the result. The exception proved the principle of Jehovah's dealing with His chosen, and bound Joshua in profounder humility and creature-nothingness to the Eternal Will.

But now let us turn to Moses. As one can discern, he is deeply moved. In his view, it is no light thing to receive a promise from God. What men of the world treat with scorn and neglect, what even numerous professing Christians can make wondrous light of, stirs this man to his depths. Some one may ask how we know this? Well, we find that he thirsts for direct personal dealing with God about this great promise. He wants to show God how he stands in relation to so gracious a word. But what

we particularly notice is that, as his soul is drawn out to God, an idea strikes him. It is not suggested by command, like the recording in the book. This is a spontaneous outcome of individual feeling and judgment at this moment. Up with the thought of approach to God, arises this other, of building an altar.

Why should he think of this? As we reflect upon the incident, that great scene in the life of a later prophet, Isaiah, recurs to the mind. His vision of God, seated on a throne high and lifted up, stirred within him, in unexampled measure, a sense of the sinfulness, the pollution, the ruin of sin. 'Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips.' And so this wonderful outflashing of divine power in great extremity, has called forth such a vision of God, before the soul of Moses, that instinctively he falls back on something, which we never know him doing before, and he prepares to meet God at the place of sacrifice. He falls back, in other words, on the thought, that only at the place of atonement can God meet him, or himself meet God. During the closing night of bondage in Egypt, God expressly taught him and his people this lesson, that they had no natural immunity from danger, but that only through the blood of the paschal sacrifice could they escape. Indeed, from infancy, in the stories of Abraham offering Isaac, and Abel's sacrifice, he had learned that only through a life offered for his life, could any one have a footing before God. Further, it is interesting to notice, that the form which the deliverance of Israel took in the mind of Moses, and in which he expressed it to Pharaoh, was that they should come out of Egypt to offer sacrifice,

and so enter again into conscious personal relations to God. Hitherto, since the deliverance had taken place, God had been acting for them in the sovereignty of love, making them merely the subjects of His favour. But the moment that He stirs them up to be fellow-workers with Him, as at Rephidim, and makes them the conscious agents of His power, lo ! in Moses' mind, the sense of the infinite distance between the Creator and the creature, the Governor and subject,—in other words, this reminiscence, (if it be nothing more) of the need of some medium of sacrifice, for communion with God.

There is an infinite suggestiveness in this incident, thus conceived. We have read, in Humboldt, of regions in South America, where, on one mountain-side, you pass through every zone of vegetation from the tropical to the arctic. There are as many varieties of intellectual and religious climate in the human soul, and the transitions are often as startling and sudden. At times the average spiritual sensibility of a generation sinks to a cold deism, which, acknowledging deity, shuts Him out from all human concerns. At other times it may rise to an operative, but legal sense of belief, in a supreme moral governor to whom we must give account ; or, rising higher, we may conceive this as a universe of self-acting moral laws, where things are so perfectly balanced that each receives in character exactly as he has sown. Or we may conceive of this as a system of things, the ruling spirit of which is beneficence, everything being ordered to guide the well-intentioned up the stages of moral life to perfect happiness. And in all these various regions we may exercise ourselves briskly, without any dominant or burdensome sense of sin.

But when these partial views will not suffice, when we cannot be satisfied with mere cleverly-devised conceptions of the Spiritual, when God breaks through into our lives, when He shows us that He has a purpose regarding us, and wants us to come into relation to Himself, then starts up the great fact of sin, and we behold the need of sacrifice, as the basis of communion with God. As tropical vegetation only emerges in the tropical zone, so these great facts of sin and the need of atonement only emerge when men rise fully into the spiritual zone, and stand face to face with God, in His revealed purpose of grace.

Thus we explain the fluctuations observable in the onward progress of the Kingdom of God. Often, after a season of spiritual concern, when man's way to God is the supreme anxiety, and the Cross of Christ dominates every other aspect of spiritual truth, we light upon an age in which strong currents set in against that truth. Men fall back from what they regard as the arbitrary and severe elements in saving doctrine, upon the ethical sequences of character, the laws for life, the social outcomes of religion,—priceless, indeed, but secondary, as being derivative aspects of Christianity; and loud pæans are sounded over the advent of a milder, more humane, more real, and more Christian message. The truth is, it is a question of climate. They have declined to a lower spiritual level, out of direct, awful contact with the living God. Whenever a soul awakens to hear God's voice, to feel that God has a purpose of mercy regarding him, and wills to live and work through him, all that moonshine of advanced thought is blotted into night, and 'How shall man be just with God?' becomes the passion, the agony of his

soul. Thus, again and again have epoch-making ages risen above the lower levels of other times; thus, rising by atonement into direct fellowship with and life in God, have men revived and extended the Church, sending waves of blessing far and wide.

But to return to our theme. Moses is being trained, as well as his people. With every onward step, he is being drawn closer and closer to God, that he in turn may bring the people. He is now standing on the threshold of Sinai, and this experience is his own introduction, to these great questions of approach by sacrifice which will concern them there. Soon he will be sprinkling the whole people, in sign that they stand committed to God's service. Methinks he learned here something of the insight he revealed there.

See him building the altar. We do not read that he sacrificed upon it. He may have done so. But he stood there, at the place of sacrifice. He had built this, that he might meet God at the place of sacrifice. An obelisk or pillar, such as his Egyptian experience suggested, would not suffice. Only at an altar could such a transaction take place. He did not offer a fresh sacrifice. Approaching Sinai, where he felt instinctively that sacrificial worship was to be set up, he was animated by the conviction that God must order the form of sacrifice, and until He act, His servant must wait. Besides, there needed no new sacrifice. He and his people stood escaped, through the blood of that paschal lamb, offered on the night preceding liberty. And standing there, beside that unsmoking altar, he realised the liberation from bondage, reaffirmed in the deliverance of yesterday.

Might we be so bold as to interpret the thoughts,

tumultuously swelling in his breast as he stands there? 'O God, when all human help had failed, by one fell stroke Thou didst give release, and through the blood-sprinkled doorposts, we passed from the bondage of ages to liberty. Through that bloody sacrifice, we actually appropriated Thy full promise of deliverance, and entered on the begun experience of liberty. Through that blood-sprinkled gateway, we have entered into all the deliverances since. And now, Thou, who didst actually fulfil Thyself to those who proved Thee by sacrifice, hast given Thy servant a promise for a long time to come. Thou hast said that Thou wilt smite our enemies—these Amalekites—even into utter oblivion. See, Lord, where I stood that night under the blood, expecting every moment deliverance, I am in spirit standing now. By this altar, the sign and symbol of sacrifice, I take Thee at Thy word, I expect the fulfilment of Thy promise. And daring to come, even through that blood-shedding which freed me, of which this is symbol, and to believe that Thou, the Infinite God, hast pledged Thyself to me, I pledge myself to Thee, commit myself body and soul to Thee, that Thou mayest accomplish Thy purpose through me. I am the Lord's warrior, yielded up wholly to Him, and He is my one strength, wisdom, hope, and stay.'

Such was the soul-exercise, the soul-victory achieved by that altar. And feeling this to be an epoch in his life, as in that of his people, he incarnated the emotion of the moment in a name which he gave to the stone altar, that it might be a memorial of this time. Ay, when a soul reaches this attitude, it is full of happy inspirations. What seems peculiarly appropriate, for his lofty level, has an

appropriateness for all levels. Jehovah-nissi — ‘the Lord my banner’—when the soldiers heard the name given to the monument, proud of their victory, they cried, ‘Yes, that shall be our sign.’ And Joshua, with his deeper insight, accepted it with a deeper devotion. And Moses, who saw furthest into its meaning, embraced the legend with profoundest enthusiasm.

Surely in this whole incident there is matter for profound reflection. Is it not strange, that specially in creative moments of the Kingdom of God, when men were mightily drawn out to be fellow-workers with God, there fell upon them this sense of sin, this consciousness of unworthiness, this need of propitiation or sacrifice, as the one way to God? Rest you certain, reader, these men made no mistake. What they felt to be the great need, is the great need for us all. It is when as poor, helpless, hell-deserving sinners we feel that we have standing merely as the unworthy recipients of sovereign mercy ; it is only when, by the Cross, we so yield ourselves to God, that He is our one end, our one stay,—it is only then that we are ready to march forth, into new revelations of God’s mind in His word, new experiences of power and grace. A religion which stops short of this has no temporal future. The unfulfilled remnant of Gospel promise, is ever to those who, meeting God in the covenant of His grace, across, so to speak, the sacrifice of His Son, accept the promise as something in which they have a right by sovereign mercy, and who yield themselves, for its realisation, as those who, being debtors to grace, are but organs to do God’s will. Never to another spirit than that, has a spiritual victory been given.

There are considerable doubts as to what is the

true rendering of the last clause in our text. But if you recall the scene, as we have tried to realise it, you will have little difficulty to grasp the meaning. At the altar, the sign and symbol of sacrifice, he has taken God at His word. There, remembering that he owes everything to Him who has delivered him, he yields himself up to be the agent of God's will. And now that altar will be a memorial to him of his own committal to this war of extermination, because it stands on God's side as a witness of His divine promise. It is as if he saw God's hand coming down on the altar: 'The hand upon the throne of Jah.' God's absolute promise, and his utter self-devotion meet. 'Does God say that He will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek? See, this altar is a pledge that I have taken Jehovah as my banner, Jehovah's will as my absolute rule, Jehovah's cause as my cause, Jehovah's battle as my battle, Jehovah as my one strength, and hope, and stay.'

That is the unfailing consequence of our taking God's promise in absolute faith. Henceforth we must become God's warriors to carry that promise into effect. Having no will or end of our own, we must live to do His will, denying ourselves, taking up His cross, resisting wrong, overpowering aggressive evil, exposing error, advancing truth, without personal advantage to gain or any personal end to seek—Jehovah our banner, Jehovah's purpose our goal, Jehovah's revealed will our rule, Jehovah's promise our strength, Jehovah's approval our personal reward. It is a life of sacrifice. But we would prefer it to all the splendours of earth on which we have ever looked, for it is a life of vision, of fellowship, of power, of victory, of glory.

XX

AMONG OLD FRIENDS : A SEASON OF REST AND REFRESHMENT

EXODUS xviii

GOD knoweth our frame. His service is a service that taxes heart and brain, to the utmost of energy and endurance. But, as every worker for Him has experienced, our Master has a wonderful way of giving us breathing-spaces. He brings to us refreshment, from human intercourse, or revives old associations, stirring the fountains of natural feeling. He raises us to moral elevations from which, for a moment, all our past lies in the most vivid light beneath our eye. Under the burden of daily life, with the constant weight of responsibility on every spring of existence, sobered by routine and depressed by difficulty, we have all felt the charm and glow, the vigour and inspiration of such seasons. Even the chance meeting with a friend, the hurried talk in an interval of business about boyish times, sends music into the heart and elasticity into the step.

We want you to think of that as a part of the divine discipline of our lives. If we are surrendered to God, our rest is as pregnant with the divine

presence, as our times of toil and sacrifice. Yea, not unseldom our brief periods of unbending, and the free play of rich family and human affections, bloom with educative influences, are starred with manifest designs of divine grace. The life in God is a glorious whole, and there is no part which has not its relations to other parts, and its significance for the highest ends.

This chapter is an interlude, between the Exodus and the perils of the desert on the one hand, and the solemnities of Sinai on the other. It is full of the natural gladness of reunion and friendship,—but, as we shall see, of deeper and diviner things.

We have been so entirely absorbed in the main action of this great movement, as to have forgotten the enormous impression which it must have produced on all surrounding nations. As we know, there was constant communication between the leading peoples of that early time. The humbling of Egypt, the slaughter of the first-born, the escape of Israel and the triumphant crossing of the Red Sea, must have sent a thrill of wonder far and wide. With the vision of a prophet, and the world-horizon of the statesman, Moses realised this in his song, 'The peoples have heard. Pangs have taken hold of the inhabitants of Philistia, then were the dukes of Edom amazed, the rams of Moab, trembling seizeth them; all the inhabitants of Canaan are melted away.' And here we find that, across the still spaces of the desert, rumour had followed rumour into the pastoral quiet of Midian, till Jethro, hearing of Israel's approach, is moved to come forth to meet them.

While lying still at Rephidim, tidings are brought to Moses which, diverting him from the pressure of

his crushing labours, stirs every tide of feeling in his heart. The service of God does not indurate, but intensifies, makes the man sensitive as he grows strong, widens the range of his sympathies, while strengthening the active powers, and heightening the purposes and resolves. Moses was a leader, a law-giver, a prophet, but he was also a husband, a father, and with the full-blooded passions of that southern clime, he would be transported with longing to fold wife and children in his embrace.

The scene—surely among the most striking on earth—now becomes defined, and from books and pictures familiar. Jethro has encamped in the plain of Er-Rahah, not far from the beetling summits of Sinai. Moses advances to meet him either from the Wady Feiran or Wady Es Sheikh. What thoughts must have filled his soul as, leaving the camp behind, he went forward to reopen the closed volume of forty long years in his career, which by the splendours of recent events seems pushed back to a greater remoteness than the years would justify. Every hill-top is eloquent with memories. Down this very plain he came, when fleeing from Egypt. It was into this deep valley among the hills that he returned with his rough flock, what time the glory of God broke on him, and the great work for which he had been preparing at last lay full in view. Here, on his way to Egypt, after parting with Zipporah, he met his brother Aaron, and amid the gathering shadows of even poured the great burden of his mission into a kindred soul.

And now all has happened as God told him, and after a career of wonders unparalleled, he finds himself back amid the scenes of his poverty and exile,

his hopes and fears, with the glad consciousness of victory, and with the sobering yet exciting premonition of greater things to come. How the world misunderstands the spiritual life! They paint it in black and grey. But God knows how, at fit times to make his saints sing—ay, dance for joy. As old Vaughan has it :—

‘ If this world’s kings could only know
What some poor man may often feel,
Glory, and gold, and crowns, and thrones
They soon would quit, and learn to kneel.’

Has this same loving Father never taken you athwart the track of buried years, and called up the past, and let you see the goodness and mercy with which He has crowned your lot, from the moment when you made the great irreversible choice, and put your life into His hands?

But who are these? Why, his boys—Gershom, the son of his sorrow, Eliezer, the bright pledge of dawning hope. But how they are grown! And Zipporah, with an eloquent yearning in her eyes, speaking her unquenched love, the sorrow of separation, the joy of reunion, keeps pace even with the fresh energies of her sons, hastening to his embrace; and following a little more slowly, as becomes the head of a clan, but with an eagerness of curiosity which all his dignity could not hide, Jethro, the brother-in-law, comes bending low. Is not that a beautiful picture? Among natural things, is there anything holier, tenderer on earth than family love? With all failures and imperfections, how it wells up from the abysses of our being, a gracious, purifying flood! Christian parents, make your hearths in a real, human sense, holy ground! Watch over yourselves, that nothing may mar the

serene atmosphere of love, seek the dove-like presence of the Holy Ghost in your own hearts, and He will cast through you a sunshine round your children, that will make home seem the heavenliest place, till they reach the heaven of immortal youth above.

A special interest attaches to the meeting of Moses and his wife. They parted in sorrow, if not in anger, she returning to her brother, while Moses went on alone to his great career. We found reason, on a former occasion, to censure her bounded vision and irresponsiveness of soul. But separation has been a severe discipline for her. Back amid the tame domesticities of Midian, she finds for the first time how much the presence,—ay, and even the enthusiasm and hope of her great husband, had impressed her. Her soul goes out to him, on his desert journey, and amid the perils of the great capital. Writers tell us how, as if by magic, tidings spread far and wide in India; and even into this land, whither men came seeking precious stones and metals, news would slowly filter. We read, ‘Jethro heard of all that God had done for Moses.’ And we may guess who was his newsmonger. Zipporah would have her own means of catching every floating air of rumour. And how it would be talked over at the tent-door, and all the moves and eventualities discussed, keenly as we discuss the problems of to-day! And as she went into the solitude of her tent or booth, she would have her own thoughts, about her folly and sin in letting him go alone. At long last she would realise the great burden that he bore, and the tremendous destiny to which she had been chosen. The hot tears would spring, as she remembered what a

narrow, tame, self-centred, irresponsible weakling she had been. A thousand times she would justify him in her heart. And with all this, his ideal self would creep into the study of her imagination. Every word he had spoken, every breathing of covenant-hope, would live in her soul. She would live with him in the great past which he had recalled, in the great future of which he dreamed.

You say, 'How do we know all that?' You have to read backwards and forwards, to know the full significance of such an incident. We discern all that through another woman's eyes. There was one who did not relish the taking back of this dark-skinned woman, and that was Miriam; and when she saw the affection which sprang up between them, and felt that Moses was withdrawn from her influence, through this new tie, a grudge against her brother began to rise in her heart. You will find the sequel of that story in the further life of Miriam. Passing from this, however, are you not glad that this woman has risen to be worthy of his affection, and that Moses has the sustainment of her sympathy and the comfort of her presence? True, she was not a great woman—even like Miriam. But often the most valued help and strength come from simple hearts, who obliterate themselves to live in the object of their overmastering regard.

We now come to events which, in the public history of the Kingdom, are more generally interesting. The leader of this band was the present head of the family, Jethro, father-in-law, or as is more probable, brother-in-law of Moses. Most likely he was a priest-king, as other contemporary rulers were. Certainly he was not a heathen. Moses recognised in him a worshipper of the true God. But he seemed entirely

outside the circle of covenant-hopes. We think of him as one who cherished the knowledge of the true God, that had been handed down from Abel, and Enoch, and Noah. His religion was a tradition, a memory ; and in the long lapse of time the tradition had become somewhat cold and formal, the memory dim. When Moses returned from the burning bush, and wished to go to Egypt, he said nothing about what he had seen to this man. He felt instinctively there would be no response ; just as we find some people draw themselves up, and become suspicious and critical, whenever you speak of conversions, or of the more marked experiences of the spiritual life. Ah, in both cases, religion is a tradition, a kind of inherited belief, and not a thing of life and power !

Even traditional religion, however, is better than none. It keeps a man from the mire of the flesh, and the corruptions of superstition. And as this man began to hear from Egypt of the wonders of God through Moses, the fountains of faith were freshened within him. Not only had God been alive centuries ago ; He was alive and working now. What had lain in his heart in implicit belief, now comes out into active, conscious thought, that his God, in whom his fathers trusted, was different from the frog-spawn of superstition. He followed, with an attentive faith, every fresh unveiling of God's power, his conception of the divine rising, his reverence and self-abasement deepening. He has none of that smallness, that sets some men talking about the poor beginnings of sons of the morning, and their own services to them. He does not say, 'Why, the man was my herdsman.' God has been pleased to make Moses the organ of His glorious purpose, the agent of His stupendous power.

Jethro, as a king, craves the renewed friendship of Moses as a king, and brings wife and sons back as the strongest proof of his love.

A useful little book might be written on the manners of the saints. Manners, we grant, belong to the minor morals, but they have an importance of their own. An unmannerly saint is an incongruous spectacle. You never saw a great saint without something of the beauty of holiness. Why, look at Moses. He had a strength that could frown down the pride of Pharaoh. By a look he could awe, by a word he could crush, myriads of armed men. Yet he is the more scrupulous to show honour, because he is the greater of the two. He does obeisance for reverence, and kisses for affection. Then, having thus welcomed them with all his heart, he brings them back to his tent.

Instinctively Moses feels that he is on new ground with them. He can freely open up to them his very heart, as to those who are in sympathy with them. Now, that is enough of itself to show their spiritual advance. There are some—even good Christian people—to whom you could not show your secret soul. Either they are not living near God themselves, or they are letting some human ambition outweigh their interests in divine things. Moses, however, opens to Jethro the whole wonderful story of God's dealings with him.

Almost more than anything else in Moses' career, would one wish to have heard that story, in the rich tones of Moses' voice, and to have watched the two figures the while, and Zipporah farther in the shadow, but drinking in every word. Can you not see the wonder deepening in Jethro's face, as Moses, in his

vivid speech, lives through again the drama of the plagues, till at last the doom of death falls on every Egyptian home? Catching himself a fresh impression of the power of God from the marvellous tale, his voice grows weighty with awe, as he recites the various stages in the history of that night, till in the morning splendour they go forth free; their march to the Red Sea, their hopeless closure between the hills and the main, till through the waters God opened up their way.

Probably, in respect of verbal picturesqueness, our war-correspondents could have written up a far more thrilling story. Neither Moses nor Jethro are thinking of that. Their souls are overwhelmed with awe of a wonder-working God. Never had two souls been swept into a more awful consciousness of the divine presence. And then Moses, with no feeling of anticlimax, but seeing in these divine dealings further and even higher tokens of the divine goodness, tells of the murmurings, of the divine gifts, of bread from heaven, and water from the rock, of the pride of Amalek humbled in the dust.

Had that narrative no purpose as regards Moses himself? Perhaps, immersed in action, he had never once looked at the whole sequence of events. He may have recovered the great series of divine deliverances, in their true relation and development, for the first time, as a conscious intellectual possession, while telling the story to his friend. Ay, and more, he may have been weary and, if not cast down, with something of the gloom of exhaustion, what with a cankered people and cruel Amalekites. But, like a trumpet to a war-horse, the sight of what God had enabled him to do would spur him to new activity.

Note two things in Moses' story worthy of remark. He leads even his brother-in-law away from himself, to Israel and to God. What he breathes into him is the wonder of God's covenant-purpose to Israel. And Jethro rejoiced 'for all the goodness which the Lord has done to Israel.' This was no personal, but a public event. Israel had been rescued from interminable captivity, and brought out into liberty for the worship and service of God. All that that involved, Jethro, from his outside standpoint, could not see; but at least he learned the sole supremacy and virtual omnipotence of God. He discerns with clear eye the moral outcome of that conflict. An unambiguous issue had been raised between the mightiest world-sovereignty, and the Divine Sovereignty. God had claimed a proprietorship in His people, and liberty for His people. Egypt had resisted that claim, and denied that liberty. And God crushed their power.

Would that many of us could even reach to Jethro's faith! Do we know, have we come to the clear, absolute conviction that Jehovah is greater than all gods,—in other words, that righteousness is supreme, over vice, selfishness, ignorance and wrong? How are we showing that faith? Is unrighteousness going down before us in the name of the Lord? Are the fetters of sin's slavery being broken in ourselves, and in those whom we seek to reach and bless? The only knowledge of God that will subdue men and control the world, is knowledge of a God who is here and now mighty over every actual evil power. And He becomes so mighty, when His people give up all for Him. Listen to this word of the risen Christ: 'He that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and

he shall rule them with a rod of iron ; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father.'

We wish you to notice particularly, what followed on this profound impression of Jehovah's greatness. There arose in this priest-king's heart the desire to offer sacrifice. From Abel's day, the conviction that God could be approached by the blood of slain victims, would live in the succession of godly families from whom he sprang. One wonders, however, if in the dull routine of home, sacrifice had hitherto been frequent. Methinks he would have gone back into a distance from God, and into a cold traditionalism of religious practice, to which sacrifice is hardly necessary. But the moment God has become a sublime present reality, and he feels himself face to face with His omnipotence, a sense of His unspeakable greatness kindles the consciousness of unworthiness, and he desires by sacrifice to approach unto God.

True, the uppermost thought in his heart is one of boundless, irrepressible thanksgiving. Yet as a good man he cannot come to praise God, without remembering the claims of God and his own demerit in His sight. It was across an offered life that he expressed his gratitude to God. Very deep and true is this feeling, in which every redeemed soul shares. There is no coming to God, except with the full recognition of our sin, presenting the sacrifice which He has declared His willingness to accept. Aught else is presumption. Is it not very significant, as we approach towards Sinai, where sacrifice was fixed in its central place in the worship of Israel, that spontaneously the need for it should arise in

widely varied circumstances? Moses (as we saw in last chapter) cannot devote himself to the fulfilment of God's promises, except across the altar of sacrifice. When boundless gratitude draws Jethro into the near presence of God, again a true reverence suggests approach to the ineffable Holiness through shed blood. They are coming up to a plane of communion, for which a divinely-appointed method of approach is a necessity. Sinai, with its further unveilings of God and its privileges of access, is manifestly the next stage in their discipline,—something for which all the past had prepared.

And so, as we rise into conscious fellowship, these holy solicitudes as to approach unto God, visit and engross our thought. The holier we are, the fuller our vision of God, the more humbly do we lay hold of the sacrifice of Christ as the one ground of our access to Him.

One of the signs, which is most truly symptomatic of religious degeneracy, is the prevailing impatience and belittling of the Atonement. Depend upon it, that always implies a low sense of sin, and a very high sense of creature self-sufficiency. Seeing ourselves as before God, in the light of the Spirit, how different is our frame! In us there dwelleth no good thing. By our sin we have forfeited every natural claim to divine consideration. Every blessing must be of sheer divine mercy, in the way of God's appointment. And so our every approach to Him must be with confession of sin, on the footing of divine promise, through the covenant of His grace. Even when we come, in the glad consciousness of sonship, to ask for strength, to dwell in His presence, to praise for benefits received, we must approach

through the sacrifice of Christ, remembering that we are received on the ground of mercy alone.

We do not wait to speak of the sacrificial meal which followed the sacrifice. Is it not beautiful to see Jethro from Midian, and Aaron and Moses in the direct line of blessing from Abraham, meeting with joy around that feast? But we hasten to a strongly contrasted point. The rest-day of Moses, with all its bright associations and memories, has come to an end. Refreshed and strengthened, he rises to another period of toil. And now we have a glimpse into, what must have been the daily burden of administration, resting on this servant of God. Ordinary life goes on, but little changed, even in the great crises of history. Men eat and drink, buy and sell, quarrel and arbitrate, sicken and die. Nice points arise about property, business relations, points of honour, questions of succession. And with the loyalty of a great heart, Moses, called to lead Israel, attempted to cope with the impossible task. Ordinary average men do not know the joy of being spent in the divine service. They have never felt the claims of conscience, which sometimes urge to that issue. They do not understand that our right, even to life, is limited by God's absolute claim upon us. A Moses might fall down and die under his burden; and they would coldly shrug their shoulders, and say, 'How imprudent!'

Jethro is very far from that spirit. He has such a pride in his brother-in-law, that he would shield him from the least harm. And so he is very quick to discern the overstrain upon Moses. In his own little world he had had to economise his resources. He came to see that human strength was limited, and

that only by a delegation of function would steady, continuous work be done. And from this vantage-ground of experience, he deals with Moses. 'The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou and this people. And what is bad for thee is bad for the people. Do as thou wilt, the work is not so well done, and they are exhausted with waiting, as thou art with thy work.' And then he unveils his plan—the very perfection of common-sense.

How touching it is, on the eve of great events, when the power of God is about to be put forth in an utterly unprecedented way, to behold simple souls, utterly ignorant of what was about to transpire, yet led by God, because trusting in Him, doing the very things which were necessary for the dawning of these events, or for their being made known when they had occurred! Thus Paul went to Damascus, little dreaming that he was moving on to the appointed scene of Christ's meeting with him, and the transfiguration of his life. The women went, in the early morning, with spices to anoint the dead, but they were at the tomb in time to witness the rending of the grave. Jethro, from the desert, brings in his honest-heartedness, his experience of life to serve as a guide for his illustrious friend, little dreaming what God had in store for that friend, and how signally these counsels, proved on the narrow arena of his own life, were to vindicate their wisdom on a stage of human action, new and unprecedented in the world. God makes little of our vaunted distinctions of great and small, clever and simple, learned and unlearned. He chose fishermen for apostles, and a village maiden became the mother of our Lord.

Love which, prompting glad obedience,
Labours most of all,
Love makes great the great and small.'

As the good man utters his sage administrative advice, his words float unwittingly to a loftier level, and take on a prophetic tone. He only imperfectly knew what the spirit speaking in him did signify. 'Hearken,' he cries, 'and God shall be with thee. Be thou for the people to Godward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God.' Moses was to be a Mediator, but on a platform how lofty above anything that Jethro conceived! 'And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws.' He was to be lawgiver, but on a scale hitherto unknown. 'And shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work which they must do.' The line of national advance, the distinctive features of covenant-activity, were to be shadowed forth by this great, regulative mind.

What a marvellously just view of the whole activity of Moses you have in these words! And then God used Jethro to cut Moses loose from entanglements of needless routine, that he might give himself to these higher tasks. There was even already a rudiment of organisation in Israel. We read of an order of elders being among them in Egypt. Now, however, it is completed. There were rulers for thousands, who would deal with matters of wider interest, and rulers for tens, entering into petty details. No natural grouping of hundreds, or fifties, but had its appropriate officer. The discipline of past months had been powerfully influencing intellect and character in thousands of the children of Israel, and so soon as God has prepared His material—men of resource, God-fearing, truthful, and

free from covetousness, He finds for them appropriate work.

A word spoken in season, how good is it! This desert-wanderer left his mark on the organisation of Israel. Yea, he has left a lesson of sanctified wisdom, on the page of inspiration, for all time. It is by multiplication of offices, and multiplicity of workers, that we are to reach out to all the ends of the Christian Church, Christianise society, and bring in the glory of the latter days.

And now the visit comes to an end. Farewells are spoken. Long, lingering looks are thrown after the receding figures, till, lost in some turn of the winding, rock-bound path, they disappear. Then the camp is all in bustle, moving forward to the Mount of God, and to those splendours and revelations of Sinai, which were to make a new day in the life of man.

THE END.
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